

CHENNAI

DOING AS MUCH AS LIFE CAN OFFER

DR. MALINI SABA, FOUNDER AND CHAIRMAN, SABA GROUP AND ANANNKE FOUNDATION IS WELL-KNOWN FOR HER SOCIAL WORK THAT EXTENDS INTO MANY FIELDS. WE CATCH UP WITH HER TO DOCUMENT HOW THE ORGANISATION HAS BEEN A HELPING HAND DURING THESE TOUGH TIMES.





WOULD THE WORD HUMANITARIAN DO JUSTICE TO THE WORK YOU DO?

My primary aim in life is to help at least one billion people around the world to gain access to basic healthcare, education and opportunities that allow them to break the cycle of poverty, and eradicate illiteracy about human right issues. To honour my father in 2002, I laid the foundation of *Anannke Foundation* (previously known as *Saba Family Foundation*), which serves as the umbrella organization for all my philanthropic work globally. My father always used to tell me that money is not to be taken for granted, it's a privilege given by God and if I am ever able to make a lot of money I must always give back to society. Having grown up the hard way, putting myself to school, working part-time and doing all sorts of odd jobs I am aware what it is like to not have money, struggle for food, pay rent and take care of siblings. This keeps me humble and I believe strongly that my role in this world is to help others. Thus, I work hard to make money to make sure I am able to manage the foundation and give back. We don't raise money at the foundation. At the end of the day, I do not look for glory or praise, my main goal is to make a difference in the world and to ease the plight of people who have little hope.

YOU ARE SOUTH INDIAN BY ANCESTRY — HOW ARE YOU CONNECTED TO THIS REGION IN INDIA AND WHAT PROMPTED YOU TO WORK FOR THE COMMUNITY-IN-NEED HERE?

My mother is a South Indian and I have grown up listening to South Indian mythologies. Our idea of a perfect vacation was travelling around the region, visiting temples and enjoying South Indian delicacies over the weekend. My goal is to have an impact on hunger and poverty and to create balance in the world. I am connected to the land here; it's a place that connects to your soul and shows the extremes that life has to offer and bathe



you in spiritual awakening. One of the reasons South India differs from the rest of India is its literacy rate, as per the 2011 census, the average literacy rate in South India is approximately 80%, considerably higher than the Indian national average of 74%. Despite this, social development continues to face several challenges and that is what prompted me to work in the region. It is mostly agrarian issues and water scarcity that affect the area. In many rural parts of the region, nutrition and sanitation issues still persist along with a creaky public health care system.

WHAT ARE THE KINDS OF HUMANITARIAN ACTIVITIES YOU ARE CURRENTLY DOING IN INDIA, SOUTH INDIA SPECIFICALLY, AND HOW DO YOU PLAN ON CONTINUING THESE EFFORTS?

We have worked with *Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA)*, for encouraging the formation of several collectives, primarily comprising women and children, *Aman Movement* to promote justice, freedom, respect, community and responsibility in society. We fund and mentor at an all-girls school, focusing on the secondary wing of around 2,500 girls, run by the *Maharani Gurcharan Kaur Euro Group* in Nabha, Punjab. We recently also worked with *Save The Children*, and donated dry white rice for 20 lakh children and their families living on streets of Delhi, J&K, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Telangana and Odisha. We work with the *Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC)* and donate 10,000kg dry white rice every month. In South India, we work with *Mother Teresa Foundation*, where I also work as an advisor on their Board of Directors.

YOU ARE VERY CLOSELY CONNECTED TO YOUR CULTURE, AND HAVE ALSO WRITTEN BOOKS ABOUT THE CULTURE OF YOUR HOMETLAND ETC — DO TELL US A LITTLE BIT MORE ABOUT THAT?

Influenced by South Indian food culture I wrote a book, *The Abbreviated Cook*, which is a compilation of quick and easy recipes that offer a twist on traditional South Indian dishes which can also be found on my website www.sereendipapice.com. I believe we must all hold on to our cultures, it is what defines us and makes us all uniquely



different. We should cherish it and be proud of where we come from.

WHO IS THE REAL DR. MALINI SABA? WHO ARE YOU BEYOND YOUR PUBLIC PERSONAS?

I am a mother; it is the most important job in the world to ensure my eleven-year-old daughter becomes a kind, loving and caring member of the community, who knows right from wrong. I believe mothers shape the future of the world, because they shape their children. The future of our world depends on the values and behaviours parents teach their children through their words and examples.

YOU HAVE CHOSEN TO WORK AS A GLOBAL ADVOCATE FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS — WHAT IS THE KIND OF WORK YOU DO IN THIS REGARD?

We promote the field of creating systematic support systems which benefit women and children who are at risk. With *Samskara* – the education arm of *Anamke Foundation*, the mission is to provide underprivileged girls access to education. There's also *UpCare* which is a non-profit organization within *Anamke Foundation* that provides access to preventative healthcare and human rights for at-risk women with a concentration on elder women's health concerns. We also give scholarship programs for school girls and funds for college preparation. We have previously funded over one million students and regularly donate funds towards building schools in Africa, India and South East Asia. Furthermore, the operations of the foundation focus on funding organizations that work with children and young adults. The foundation educates and regularly runs campaigns against cyber bullying, physical bullying, social bullying, verbal bullying and workplace bullying. We also fund legal battles for women and engage in campaigns that deal with diverse women's issues.

HEALTHCARE IS SOMETHING YOUR CSR WING FOCUSES ON — WHAT KIND OF WORK HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO DO HERE?

With regards to healthcare, we focus on building new hospitals, mental health and also financing doctors to get better training — the latest area we have been focused on is telemedicine. We have also partnered with *Stanford University Medical Centre* to fund and train emergency care physicians from India to go back with skill sets needed to help develop emergency care in rural districts and promote mobile programs in preventive health practices for immunizations, gastric and reproductive health. We also partnered with *CARE International* in Togo, West Africa to fund programs in health, water infrastructure, prevention of child trafficking and capacity building for community organization.

IF YOU WOKE UP ONE DAY WITH THE POWER TO CHANGE ONE THING IN THE WORLD, OR ERADICATE SOME PROBLEM — WHAT WOULD YOU CHOOSE AND WHY?

I would eradicate hunger. Everything stems from there. There is enough food in the world but we choose to waste most of it. We also choose who has access and who does not. Food is a human right and there should never be an individual going to bed hungry.