

Donor Speak



Around 15 years ago, two of my friends got me started on the journey with Tribal Health Initiatives, which is still going strong. One friend, Manoharan, spoke to me about a wonderful couple - Dr. Regi and Lalitha Regi who with their super-dedicated team, have been making their best efforts to ensure that the tribals of Sittlingi receive the basic healthcare that we in the cities take for granted and essential emergency services too. Another good friend, Dharmaraju Kakani, who when I was trying to repay him the application fees he had paid for my pursuit of higher studies for some of the institutions, said "do not pay to me, pay it forward."

Pallavi (my wife) and myself made up our mind on steadily giving back to the society, how much we can. Over the years, I came to believe that good health and education are the quickest routes to diminish poverty.

An encouraging factor about THI is that they are forever exploring ways to enhance their development impact and serve their targeted communities better and in a more comprehensive way. This entails trying out several new activities and approach, which at times may not fit within the existing plans, programs and the requirements of the traditional, larger, institutional donors. This is where the contributions of an individual can prove to be very handy as they often come with no strings attached and quickly deployed with maximum flexibility. - I would like to think we have been of some help to THI in their path breaking way.

- **Mr Sri Kumar Tadimalla**, Supporter of THI
Senior Transport Specialist, The World Bank



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Tribal Health Initiative

Helping tribals, heal themselves



The Tribal Health Initiative story



This is the 25th year since we first set foot in the beautiful forested valley of Sittilingi, Harur taluk, Dharmapuri, Tamilnadu that is inhabited by tribal people, popularly called as the 'Malvasias' or 'Hill People'. We, Dr. Lalitha and myself, Dr. Regi George, started Tribal Health Initiative (THI) in 1993 from a small mud and thatch hut that the tribals helped us build. There was no electricity, no road or scant public transport to our thatched hut which was a hospital for the community.

Much has changed now, we have a 40 bedded hospital with 2 operating rooms, from being the doctor couple who ventured into the forest with 2 staff members, our medical team has grown into a group of 6 doctors which include a surgeon, a gynecologist and an anesthesiologist. Our doctors are supported by 50 trained staff - most of whom are the tribal youth from the community around. THI has progressed steadily into being a well equipped secondary care hospital with all modern facilities, a base hospital which caters to more than 1.lakh, mostly tribal people.

Health and Food traditionally have been connected. We helped tribals start organic farming and tribal embroidery units to generate alternative incomes in lean periods of the year and also revive the traditional art form and designs of the Lambadi Community, this today involves over 500 farmers and 500 women [craft and women entrepreneurship combined].

All this was possible due to the community we work with, without their support we could not have accomplished and created impact on many lives. Thanks to one and all, both to our supporters across the world and the tribal communities of Sittilingi Valley.



Mission

Work towards improving and providing the best atmosphere that will develop and sustain the tribal communities

Vision

The people of Sittilingi Valley and Kalrayan Hills In Dharmapuri district, Tamil Nadu lead a better quality of life keeping their traditions, customs and pride intact.

Organic farming

Unfold the old traditional methods of Organic farming

Sittilingi Organic Farmers Association - SOFA has now metamorphosed into a company, 500 tribal farmers got together and after numerous discussions and training, have become a producer company of 800 tribal shareholders.

The uniqueness is - all the company directors and CEO of SOFA are local people - making a small dream come true for THI - a company of the tribals, by the tribals and for the tribals. SOFA also had a record turnover of Rs 80+ lakh last year, with much more customer base due to improvement in quality control and more farmers coming into the fold.

SOFA has now moved into a new 3 acre campus to facilitate a farming resource centre, godown and bigger processing centre, which will increase the productivity by next year.

Health Care

Simplifying Health Care for the tribals

We run a small hospital that caters to 1 lakh people and 4 districts for low cost, secondary care of comparable quality that is otherwise found 85km away in Salem. In the year 2016-17 our health programs provided outpatient services for around 29,000 people and admitted 1,591 patients. Surgeries showed a 11% increase and stood at 714 while we also delivered 292 babies.

Our health programs are in 33 hamlets which focuses on Hypertension Control, Old Age insurance, School health program, while our Outreach clinics continues to be a great help to people with chronic diseases who have to be monitored monthly and also for post operative cases coming for the hills. Our nurses visit each antenatal house to provide health care for them.

Craft

Wings to fly - Porgai Craft finds a base

Porgai was started in 2006, the Porgai Center was started in 2015. It was a dream come true for Gammil and Neela, two senior artisans who almost 10 years ago started training the younger generation on the intricacies of Lambadi embroidery under the relentless push and support of Lalitha. The Titan Porgai Craft Centre was opened in the presence of Mr Bhasker Bhat, MD, Titan Company and his colleagues in 2015.

With 60 artisans, both men and women, each earned between Rs 3,000 to Rs 5,000 per month, showing a visible shift towards gender equality and independence in these villages. This year porgai sold goods worth around Rs 40+ lakh, of which Rs 15 Lakh went as wages - enhancing their local economy and welfare



1993



2017

Infant mortality* has reduced from 147 to 20 per 1000 and women's acceptance for antenatal** examination has increased from 11 to 90 percent since the initiation of the outreach program.

*Infant mortality, refers to the death of infants and children under the age of five
**Antenatal examinations are the screening during pregnancy