



**A loving home for abandoned and  
orphaned children**

2023 Appeal



# Welcome

Welcome to the Annual Sri Ram Foundation Newsletter! Sri Ram Ashram is a bright spot in the world and your support makes it so. Please enjoy reading about history, children's lives, school building developments, leadership perspective, and more! Thank you for giving your precious time and valuable support to this wonderful and successful project inspired by Baba Hari Dass and fulfilled daily by dedicated people from around the world.

**Sarada Diffenbaugh**  
President, Sri Rama Foundation



# Our History

Sri Ram Foundation, Ashram, and School are founded on love, dedication, and inspiration. These are at the heart of our history, and they continue to be at the heart of all that guides us today.

Baba Hari Dass (1923-2018) was a master yogi, author, and artist whose example of love and dedicated service inspired the foundation of Sri Ram. One day, shortly after Babaji, as his students affectionately called him, came to the USA in 1971, his sponsor and dedicated student Ma Renu (Ruth Horsting, 1919-2001) offered to gift him \$25,000.

Babaji, was a life-long renunciate monk and declined to accept the gift. He asked Ma Renu if she would like to help orphans in India instead. She donated these funds and established Sri Ram Foundation, a non-profit dedicated to supporting destitute children in India and to publishing Babaji's prolific writings on leading a spiritual life in contemporary times and classical yoga teachings.

With his love, mastery, and compassion Babaji inspired his students in their self-development, in their yogic life, and in their establishment of several institutions of service in addition to Sri Ram Ashram (SRA) and Sri Ram Vidya Mandir Children's School (SRVM} in Haridwar, India. These include Mount Madonna Center, Mount Madonna School (PK-12th), and Mount Madonna Institute (WASC accredited college) in Central California, USA, and Salt Spring Center and Salt Spring School (K-5th) in BC, Canada.

In 1983 Babaji, Ma, and several students went to India in search of land to start Sri Ram Ashram. Although none was found, Indian devotees continued the search and when Babaji and his students returned in 1984 there was a four-acre parcel, located near the jungle outside of the sacred city of Haridwar, waiting. There was only a single lane road from the city to the property, no electricity or running water, and elephants crossed from the jungle at all hours. Yet it was beautiful and affordable. Anath Sishu Pa lan Trust was incorporated as the legal structure to receive destitute children and the property was purchased.

The first child arrived in 1987 and children have been arriving ever since. As I write, there are 113 alumni and 70 current children in residence.

Sarada Diffenbaugh



# Sri Ram Ashram Today

Babaji's mission was to create a place where children are not only provided basic life needs, but also the nourishment of love and care we associate with home. His saying, *love loves love*, has become the guiding value of Sri Ram Ashram. All staff, volunteers, and children strive to live into this principle, even amid challenges. Love and care permeate this wonderful home for children. That love is expressed by all of you who give so generously for the children's welfare. Due to your kind gifts the property has been transformed. Dwellings for boys, girls, staff, and guests have been constructed. The kitchen is a hub that serves fresh fruits and well-prepared vegetarian meals. A small clinic takes care of health emergencies.

The school, Sri Ram Vidya Mandir now has 700 students, is CBSE accredited for PK-12th class, and is now a giant of education in the local area. This year's main project is to increase the school building so that it can support the excellent education that goes on inside the classroom.

SRA is impacting all of India through its efforts on behalf of children such as ours. Due to SRA Trustee and President Rajiv Bhalla's work with governmental agencies, all adoptees in the nation are now able to obtain identity cards for national use and passports for foreign travel. This was previously not available. Additionally, SRA has created a model for the Uttarakhand State in adoption procedures. Prospective parents and their to-be-adopted child participate in a well-articulated process that ensures a smooth transition to their new life together and maintains loving ties to SRA. Other adoption agencies are following suit and changing their procedures to match those of SRA, for the benefit of the children and those who love them.

The true test of your success in choosing to give to the children of Sri Ram Ashram is in the children themselves. The alumni are a good barometer of success. As adults these former residents now care well for families of their own, practice in professions such as nursing, dentistry, and hotel management, and continue to return to SRA to share holidays and celebrations. The current resident children are a good barometer as well. They are champions in the classroom, on the sports field, and in their relationships, showing their appreciation through their discipline and love.

Although Baba Hari Dass and Ma Renu are no longer with us, their vision continues to live on. Ma's generous seed gift is bearing fruit. Babaji's exceptional love and compassion is in the children and their caregivers who make *love loves love* a daily reality.



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**You support the future by participating in creating a loving home, education, health, and wellness for those who are young and vulnerable and desperately need refuge. Thank you.**



# Expanding Education: Sri Ram Vidya Mandir

Having returned just recently from Sri Ram Ashram I am happy to report that the long-awaited expansion at Sri Ram Vidya Mandir (SRVM), the school sponsored by the ashram, is well underway.

Many years ago our school began as a project for the children of Sri Ram Ashram. It was held in the downstairs rooms, and in warm weather on the roofs of the residential blocks. Gradually we began to allow children from local area to attend as there were no educational opportunities in our rural area. We realized we had an opportunity to expand the work of the orphanage and serve the needs of the children of the local villages. We built the ground floor of the school opening what seemed comparatively like a huge space of 15,000 square feet. In a few years, due to the increasing demand and recognition of SRVM quality, we constructed a first floor thinking that would be adequate for the foreseeable future. What began as a project for about forty children, within the next 15 years grew to a Nursery to 12th Class school of over 700 students.

It became clear that more space was needed to even accommodate the students already we had, while more applications kept coming. After several years of delay due to the pandemic we broke ground in April of this year 2023. As of this writing we are about to cast the second half of the roof of a new and more spacious 30,000 square foot addition, essentially doubling the classroom area.



The ground floor of new addition will offer expanded classrooms for the pre-primary school (Nursery and the lower and upper kindergartens) and allow us to develop a better student to teacher ratio at the most formative stage of the learning process. It will allow us to do the same upward through the grades ensuring a better learning environment for all. It is through the generosity of our donors that we are able to make this expansion. SRVM charges nominal fees to our students, enough to cover operating costs, the bulk of which are teacher salaries. We also offer scholarships to those students who are still unable to afford our modest rates so that funds are not a barrier to entry.

What we have learned is that talent is everywhere in India but while things are improving in many sectors, opportunity is not. With the help of our generous donors we are simply putting opportunity in front of talent and watching the amazing results.

An example of this is seeing what happened when a few years ago an inspired sports teacher with a passion for field hockey joined us. In the ten years of his presence has taken our group of children from the ashram and the local village to claim four national championships. Once again in 2023 has qualified both the boys and girls teams to seek yet another. We just received news that the girls team are national champions. On the academic side we are seeing many children being the first in their families to complete high school and the first to attend college, opening a field of opportunities never open to them before.

Your support for this, our largest expansion would be deeply appreciated.

**SN Mailliard**

**Vice President and CFO, Sri Rama Foundation**



# Small Miracles

## Gauri and Vidhi

Amidst the rush of school, studies, holidays, celebrations and comings and goings there are quiet miracles happening that you can easily miss. By luck I witnessed two quite recently. You might not think catching sight of a brief game of hide and seek between two children as particularly miraculous, but recently I was crossing the courtyard and I noticed little Gauri who is age seven, passing by alone with great focus. Usually there is someone with her so I paused to see where she was going. As I watched her out of the corner of my eye I saw the top of a small head peeking out from behind the large mango tree. Gauri continued on her search and to her delight discovered Vidhi hiding. I realized, Oh hide and seek, and then it struck me I was witnessing something I never would have imagined just a six short months ago.

You see, Gauri is about 7 years old. When she first came at the age of about two and a half years she could not sit or crawl or hardly lift her head. A developmental pediatrician said that she likely also has cerebral palsy, and was estimated to have a cognitive understanding of a three and a half year old. She has difficulty swallowing food and drink, which likely stems from a brain injury and is blind in her left eye due to an injury before she came. Gauri's primary caretaker Godamvari has invested great time and energy in making sure that Gauri is well fed and doesn't miss any social activities at the Ashram. It seems a miracle that she is walking so well now, and can brush her teeth and use the bathroom on her own. She is extremely eager to learn and now knows some signing, and can make herself understood by the people around her.

Vidhi the co-conspirator of the game will be five in May. Vidhi also has a congenital disability called a proximal femoral focal deficiency meaning the her left leg is malformed and will never function. She also has renal problems and must take medication for blood pressure. Vidhi is extremely bright, energetic and fearless. With her recently acquired prosthetic leg she participates in every activity and seems unaffected allowing nothing to hold her back.

The love and care that Gauri has received since arriving at the ashram has transformed a child that just a year ago seemed to have no hope of any independence of movement to one who I on the move fully engaged in a game of hide and seek with Vidhi. To see the two of them together Vidhi moving with such agility and lovingly encouraging Gauri in play that gave me a feeling that goes beyond words to fully describe. I thought this is why we are here.





# Small Miracles

## Parth

Six months ago, when I was at the ashram, I did not see this boy move or show emotion or much affect at all. He was basically unresponsive. I thought he might have a brain injury. When I returned in November this is what I found: during that first visit, despite his seeming lethargy and disinterest, I saw the children at the ashram caring for him, carrying him, calling him out from his dullness. Babaji's intention was to create a loving home for children, and clearly at the same time created a home of loving children. In just six months I think I witnessed demonstrable proof that love heals.

SN Ward Mailliard



Thanks to all who support these quiet miracles. If you have never visited come see for yourself. If you can't make the journey, I hope the stories will let you know.





# Ways to Give

Sri Ram Ashram believes every child deserves the opportunity to become a contributing member of society. Your continued support helps us make this dream a reality.

- ✦ **Donate Online**  
Give via credit card [sriramashram.org/donate](https://sriramashram.org/donate)
- ✦ **Mail a Check to**  
Sri Rama Foundation, 445 Summit Road,  
Watsonville, CA 95076
- ✦ **Other Ways to Give**  
We also accept donations in the form of  
stock, corporate matching, planned  
giving and EFT.

For more information email us [sriram@mountmadonna.org](mailto:sriram@mountmadonna.org)  
or call **(408) 842-8117**.

Advaita Society Inc: Sri Rama Foundation, a US 501 (c)(3) public charity, EIN 51-0174677.

Sri Ram Ashram is also a dual-qualified charity registered in India as Anath Shishu Palan Trust of India, PAN# AABTA5685N



# Celebrations

## Diwali

Perhaps the largest and most anticipated holiday in India is Diwali, the festival of lights. The five day celebration including the traditional building of decorated mud huts by the children, and their acting out the parts of the noble King Ram and his family returning from exile took place as it has for centuries. This is a time when the countryside and houses are decorated in colorful lights all over India and many sacred ceremonies take place with gifts exchanged; a time when people return to their villages and homes to be with loved ones. In November we saw most of our college students (of which we have 13 at present) come home, along with a number of young adults either married or from their jobs.

In all of this we see the continuing fruition of the life work of our founder Baba Hari Dass, the students he inspired and those who have given generously to this work. We are seeing lives, saved and transformed, and the emergence of caring, self-reliant capable citizens into the Indian society and beyond.



# Celebrations

## Prabha and Devin

If that were not enough, in the days following we celebrated the engagement of Prabha Sharan and Devin Bhattacharya. It capped the Diwali holiday with a splendid engagement ritual and party.

Love had blossomed stateside between Prabha and Devin. Prabha grew up at the ashram until aged 16, at which time she moved to USA to attend Mount Madonna School, college, and eventually become a nurse at Stanford University. Devin, a musician, sound engineer, and videographer, first came to Sri Ram Ashram as a Mount Madonna School student. He now returns annually for SRF projects, as a member of the Children's Advisory Committee, and has become a beloved part of the children's lives.

Prabha and Devin are integral to the Sri Ram and Mount Madonna Communities. The couple arrived at Sri Ram Ashram to share the *segai* (engagement) ceremony with their Sri Ram family, on the one free day between all the Diwali-time holidays. The children rose to the occasion, with the older children helping arrange the festivities. A highlight was the profuse showering of marigold petals after the ring exchange, after which Devin and Prabha playfully pelted each other with petals. The younger girls, boys, older girls, and alumni each offered a dance after the ceremony, and a delicious buffet of Indian party-favorites was served.

The couple will return after children complete their exams in March of 2024 for the marriage ceremony and another party to celebrate!



# Celebrations

## Babita Weds Lucky

In February, Babita Sharan married Lucky Singh. Lucky has been a part of the Ashram's extended community since attending Sri Ram Vidya Mandir. Babita and Lucky were classmates and remained close friends. Their families gave the blessing for their marriage. The wedding ceremony took place at a Gurdwara, a Sikh Temple, in Haridwar followed by a reception at Sri Ram Ashram. There were dance performances by the children, students visiting from Mount Madonna School and the groom's family jumped in with an impromptu dance performance.





## Appreciating Staff

Gandhari is a woman from the local village of Gadziwali who was hired to help care for newborns in 2022 when we had a large number of infants and newborns to care for. She gave herself 100% to the task, caring for three babies and a four year-old mischievous girl. She moved from a day position to full-time caregiver position but then became extremely ill. She underwent abdominal surgery but developed a serious post-op infection. Sri Ram Ashram took on the medical expenses to save Gandhari's life as well as working to provide her daily needs while hospitalized. Over a month later she has now returned to her position as "Mommy" for the three babies, now rambunctious infants. She again cares for them with love and affection, which they mirror back to her. We are grateful to Gandhari for her devoted work, welcome her into our Sri Ram Ashram family, and are thankful that we were able to offer her the support she needed in her life though this hard time.

Godamvari is also an exceptional "Mommy" to the children. She has taken on caring for the disabled children that come to the ashram. She gives herself cheerfully and fully despite the work required. Gauri, as noted, has blossomed from a traumatized, physically-challenged victim of abuse into an ambulatory, bright and involved member of the family, albeit still unable to verbalize. Supriya is a severely mentally and physically challenged eight-year old who arrived in 2022. She is unable to walk, speak, feed or bathe herself. However, the change in her mood and energy is palpable. She is much more focused and aware of the world and others around her. With Godamvari's care (and the help from some very special ashram children!) Supriya now loves to go outside at play time for a ride in her stroller. She loves to be "surprised" by people coming behind her and calling her name, to which she laughs with delight. She slips one shoe off on the driveway just to tease Godamvari, who responds with a joking "SUPRIYA!" Godavari's patient and devoted care has given new life to these children, she is an inspiration.

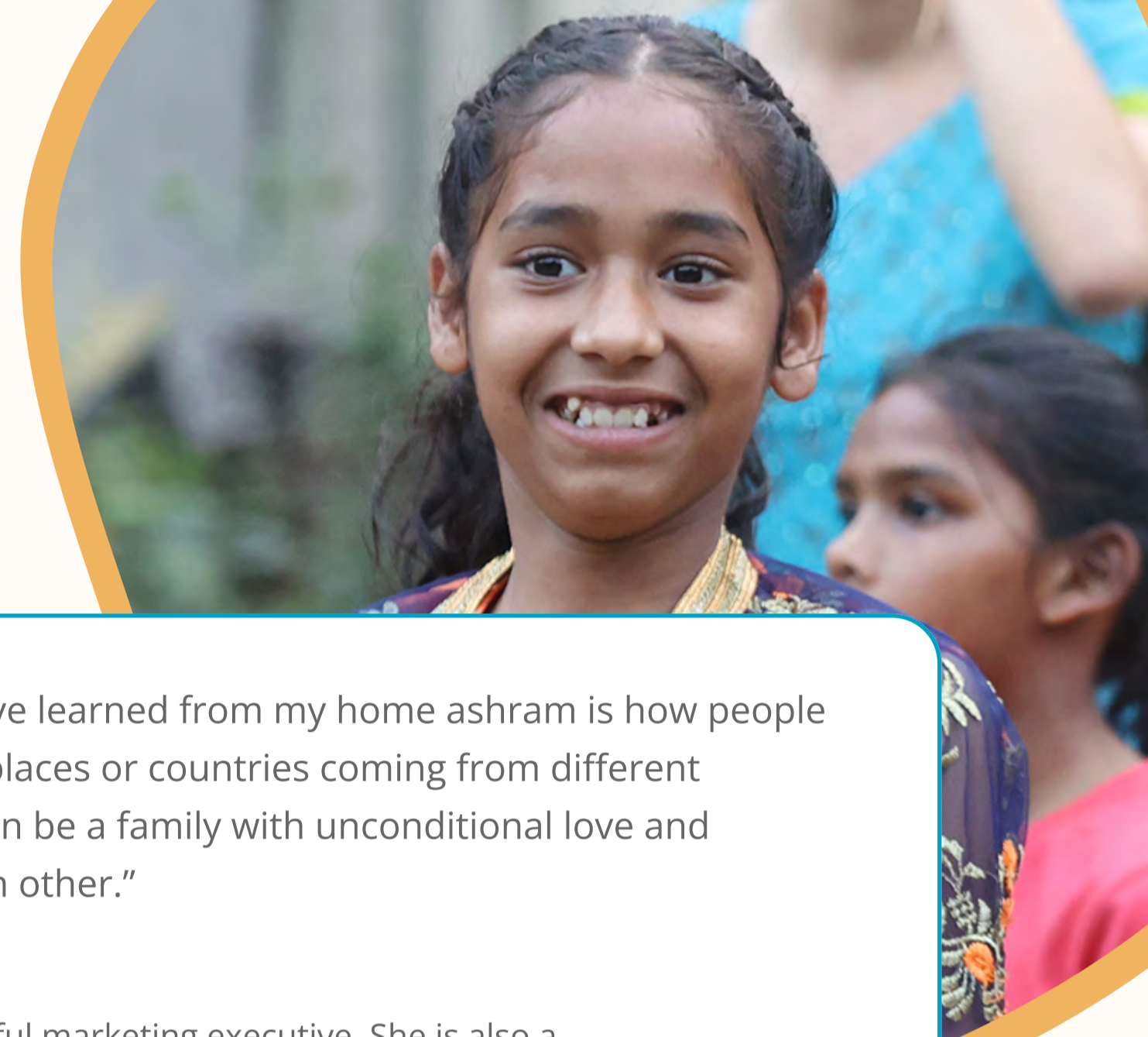
# Appreciating Staff

Finally, Andrea, who has returned after being away for 10 years, has brought organization, expert knowledge, care, and love to the ashram. As a nurse Andrea works to keep the children well, fully-immunized, and attends to them when they are ill. She oversees weekly staff meetings and meets with staff to ensure childrens' needs are being met. With additional school teachers hired this year for daily study hall (tuition) and to work with special-need students, the staff is doing a great job of meeting physical, emotional, and education needs of the children.



# Notes of Gratitude

The children who've grown up at SRA wanted to share some words of gratitude and the impact the Ashram has made on their lives.



"Thank you Babaji! I feel honored to have such an amazing and supportive father like you. Words can never express my gratitude towards you. Thanks for all your sacrifices, dear Babaji. We miss you everyday."

**Parama Sharan**

Parama plays field hockey at the National and State level for India.

"Best thing I have learned from my home ashram is how people from different places or countries coming from different backgrounds can be a family with unconditional love and supporting each other."

**Renu**

Renu is a successful marketing executive. She is also a mother and happily married.



"The Ashram helped me a lot at to get to the next level through education, guidance, environment and skills. It shaped me by teaching me to survive and support myself. I guide and give hope, support and confidence to all younger children whenever I am the Ashram. I want to also volunteer helping in everything to all of our younger kids at the ashram. I see the world as our happiness, all it all depends upon is how and what we choose to do."

**Narayan Sharan**

Narayan works in the hospitality and hotel industry.

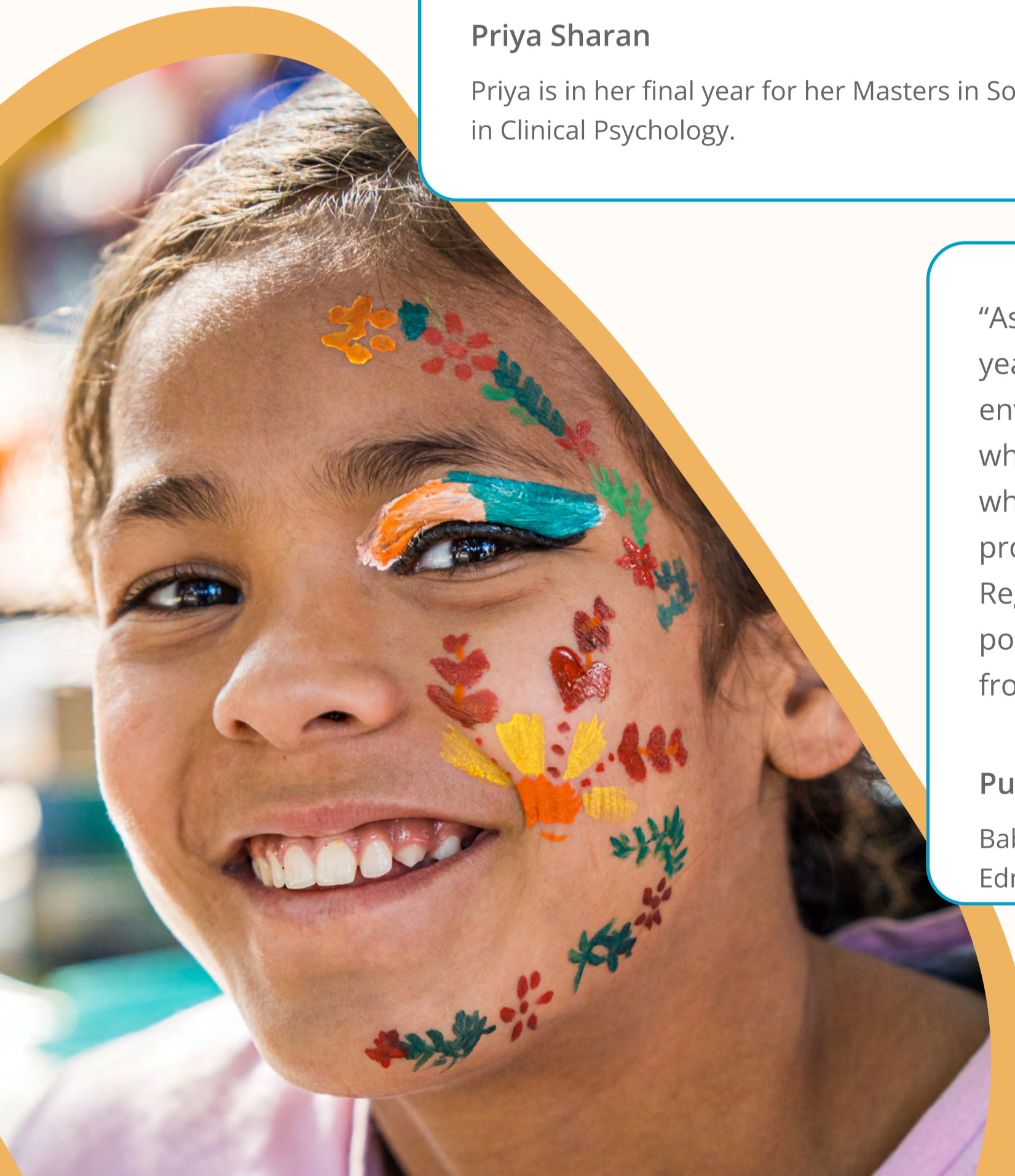




"I will always be grateful for being a part of Sri Ram Ashram. This place has given me everything that a person can hope for. Now it's my turn to do good in my life like my father Babaji has done. He has always been my idol and inspiration "

**Priya Sharan**

Priya is in her final year for her Masters in Social Work in Clinical Psychology.



"Ashram plays an important role in my life in many ways. I was 2 years old when I came there and was raised in a loving environment around many brothers and sisters. Most importantly what I learned from there is to spread love and accept people for who they are. This learning helped me a lot in my personal and professional life. I worked at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital as a Registered Nurse for 9 years and currently, I am pursuing my post-diploma course in Gerontology and hospice palliative care from MacEwan University."

**Purnima Babita Sharan**

Babita is a highly accomplished nurse. She is now studying in Edmonton, Canada.

“ I feel what I’m today is because of Babaji, he adopted me and gave me a chance to live my life. I have learnt so much from him and I wish to continue it by giving back to the community. Currently I’m working as a sports teacher in our own school. Thankful and grateful to him and everyone.”

**Jyoti Sharan**

Jyoti is the sports teacher at our very own Sri Ram Vidya Mandir School.



“The Ashram has played the most crucial role in my life. Rather, I wouldn't like to refer to it as 'The Ashram', I would like to call it 'My home'. My life has started from here only. It has helped me shape myself in a lot of aspects, be it in academics, sports, behaviour, extra activities, and many more. The most important things that I've learnt from here and will carry them throughout my life are Love, respect, and discipline. With all these things kept in my mind, I've graduated from college, and now I'm working as a 'Software Developer' in India. I see the world as a more loving place. We should spread love and respect in this world. And help the needy ones. I am a proud Sri Ram Ashram child.”

**Anjali Sharan**

Anjali works as a Software Developer in India.





“Nursing is a very tough job in India. Everyone wants a settled life but not everyone can afford the college fees. Above paying the fees, my home supported me in every good and bad situation. My family means everything to me. Now I am a permanent nurse in Holy Family Hospital and the credit goes to my family, the Sharan family.”

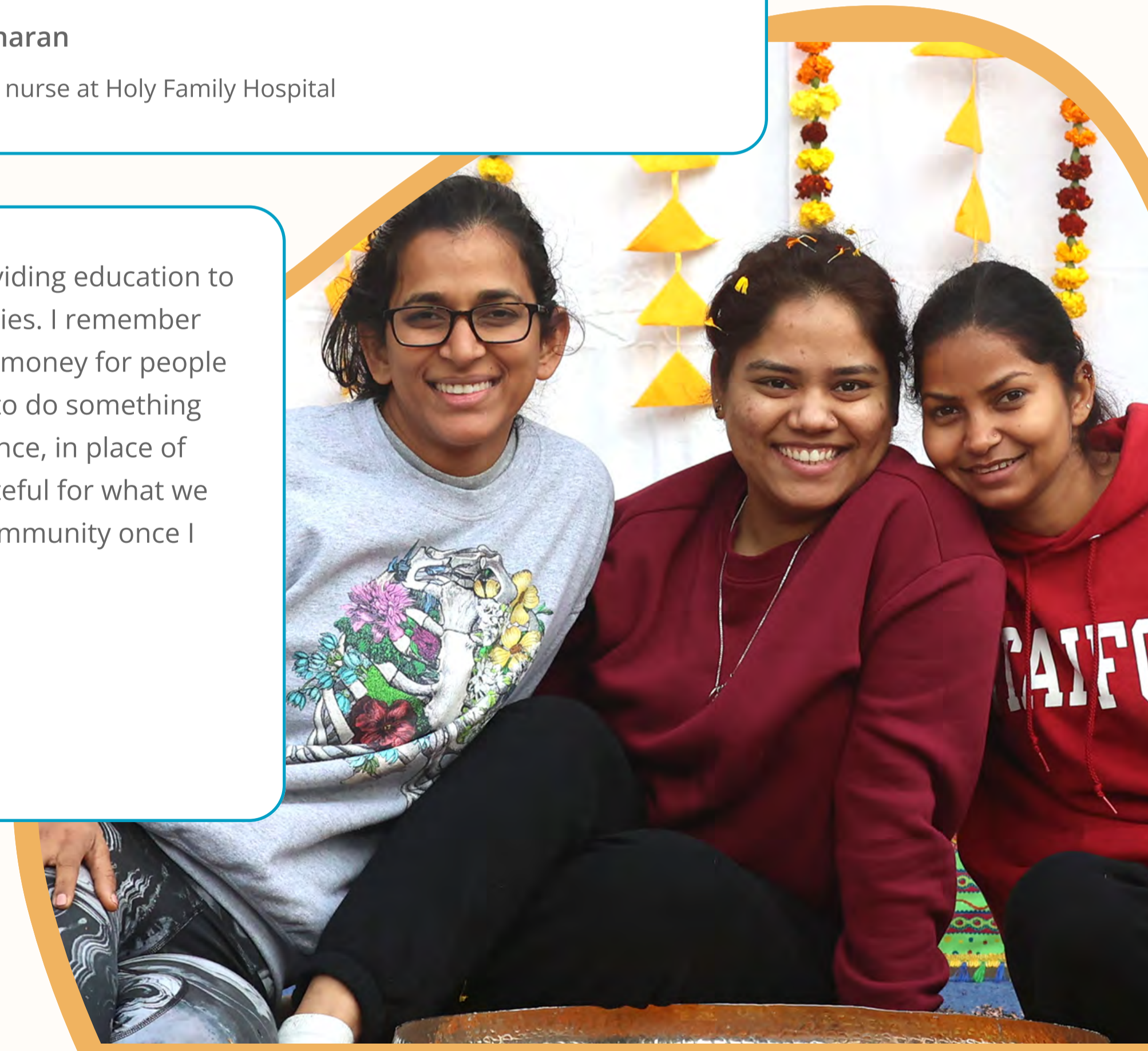
**Rachna Sharan**

Rachna is a nurse at Holy Family Hospital

“Currently I am working in an NGO which is providing education to the children belonging to low income communities. I remember once we did a fundraiser at the ashram to raise money for people going through cancer. It felt so good to be able to do something for others. It felt good to be on the giving side once, in place of receiving. While the ashram taught us to be grateful for what we received it also taught me to give back to the community once I grew up.”

**Radha Sharan**

Radha works for a non-governmental organization in India called Manjal Mystics.





[www.sriramashram.org](http://www.sriramashram.org)