TURNING POINTS

How Philanthropists Sparked Systemic Change

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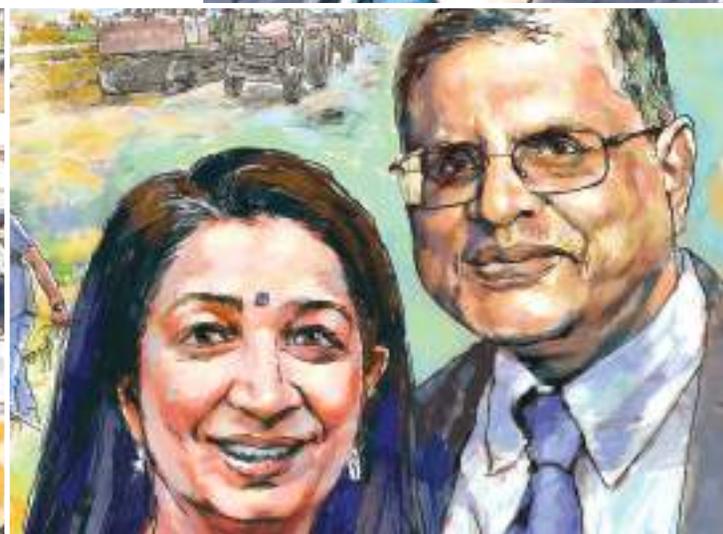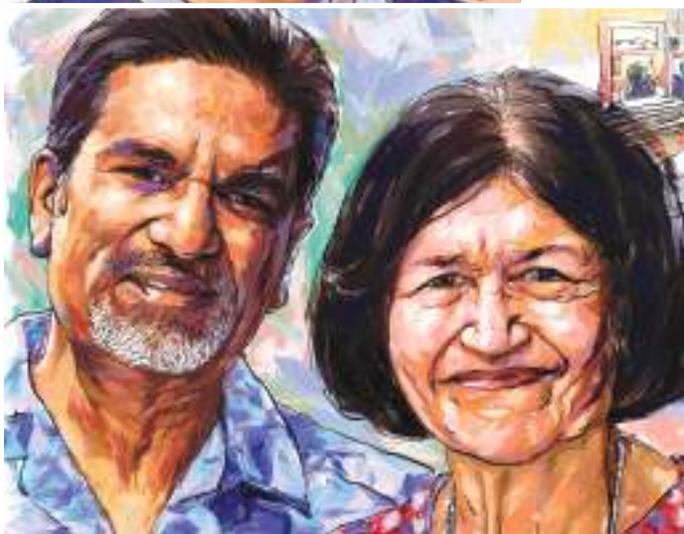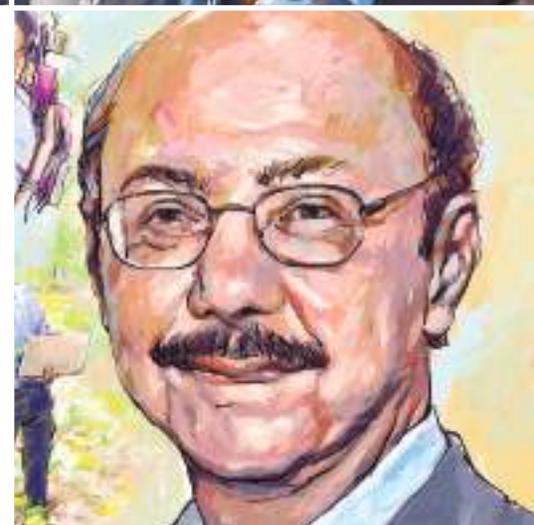
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Rizwan Am
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Ajay Bhargava Bharti Kan
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& Sunil Rekha
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This book is jointly authored by **The Convergence Foundation (TCF), SCALE, Accelerate Indian Philanthropy (AIP)** and **India Impact Sherpas**.

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The book has been designed by **PealiDezine** (*pealidezine.com*),
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Foreword

Amitabh Kant
Former CEO of
the NITI Aayog

I ndia today stands at an extraordinary moment in its development journey. With a population of over 1.4 billion, a young workforce, rapid urbanisation, rising digital adoption, and accelerating economic reforms, the country is poised to become one of the world's biggest engines of growth. India's economic growth has also given rise to a new generation of philanthropists who are not only giving *more*, but thinking *differently* about how change happens, and are seizing this moment to shape the systems that will define India's next chapter of growth.

Over the last decade, public systems have expanded at an unprecedented scale—from digital public infrastructure to national missions in health, education, nutrition, and financial inclusion. Yet, experience within the government also makes it clear that philanthropy can play a vital role in complementing state capacity. Philanthropy, at its best, plays a catalytic role in enabling these very public systems. Risk-taking, patient capital, and philanthropic investments can support innovations that truly improve public systems at scale. These may include providing deep technical advisory to design programmes, testing scalable pilots that serve as evidence points, and building public goods such as digital platforms and knowledge products.

The individuals and institutions featured in this book exemplify such a mindset shift from attribution to contribution. Their work reflects an understanding that durable progress comes not from parallel delivery models, but from strengthening the very systems that deliver outcomes to millions. India's recent progress on foundational literacy and numeracy demonstrates this: learning levels in early grades have improved in several states due to a combination of government commitment, civil society expertise, and philanthropic support. Similar patterns can be seen in digital health, financial inclusion, and women-led development, where early philanthropic investment in research, technology, and capacity has subsequently scaled through public systems.

What stands out in the featured stories that follow is the intentionality with which these philanthropists take long-term bets, align with public priorities, and converge resources – financial, intellectual, and social – towards shared outcomes. This
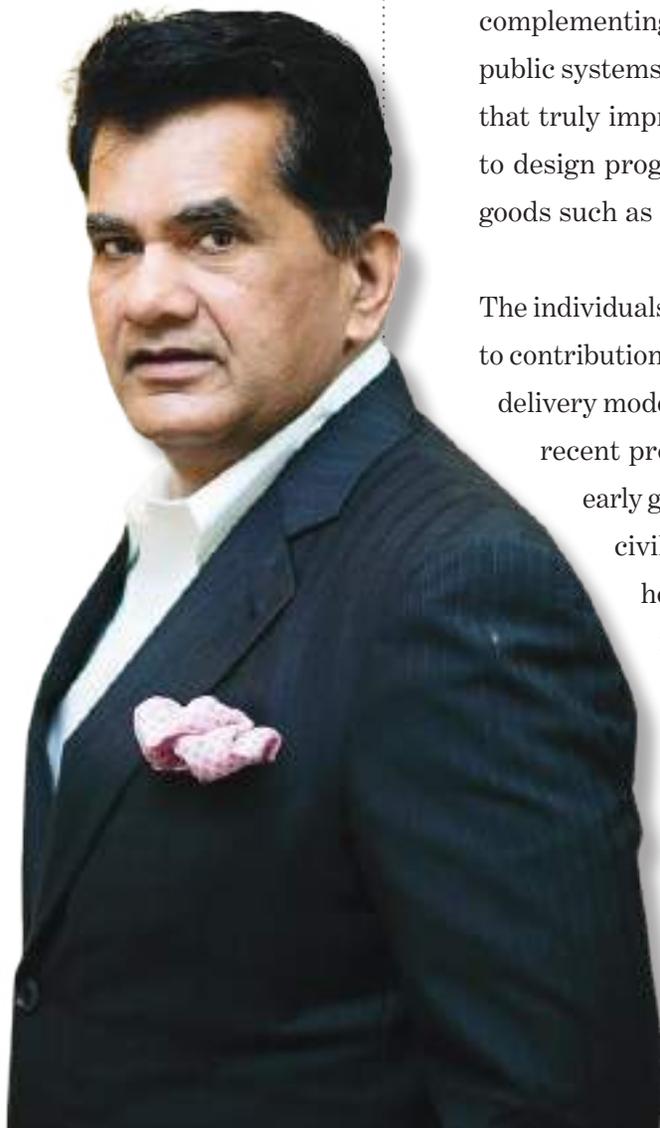
approach requires patience, trust, and humility, but its rewards are profound. This is the "multiplier effect" of systemic giving—every rupee invested strategically can unlock many multiples in public budgets, institutional reforms, and citizen outcomes.

As India looks ahead to the next phase of its growth, the partnership between the state and philanthropy will be critical. While the Government brings its reach and resources, Philanthropy brings flexibility, risk capital, and innovation. Together, they can accelerate progress in ways neither could achieve alone.

This book is both a celebration and an invitation. It celebrates philanthropists who are already shaping India's future through systemic, collaborative approaches. And it invites others to join this journey, to engage deeply with public systems, to take bold, long-term bets, and to contribute not just to programmes, but to the architecture of national progress. ●

"As India looks ahead to the next phase of its growth, the partnership between the state and philanthropy will be critical."

Introduction

Ashish Dhawan

Founder-CEO, The
Convergence Foundation

F ew countries have attempted transformation at the scale India is undertaking today. Landmark gains in education, financial inclusion, and digital public infrastructure have reshaped the country's development trajectory. Yet, persistent gaps in human development – across foundational learning, healthcare and livelihoods – reflect deeper systemic challenges that continue to limit millions of Indians from achieving their true potential. Solving these problems at scale will define the next phase of India's growth and social progress.

Philanthropy has an important role to play in this journey. It can take many forms. Programmes are often the entry point. They improve outcomes on the ground and surface new models of change. However, large-scale and sustainable impact emerges only when these models are translated to work within and through public systems. This means addressing root causes, designing solutions for population-level scale, and aligning closely with government policies and programmes. Today, India is uniquely positioned to pursue this path, with a vibrant civil society, an ambitious state, and a growing community of philanthropists willing to invest with patience and purpose.

This book was born from a desire to learn from, and shine a light on, a subset of the many philanthropists who are already practising this form of giving. It profiles the journeys of eleven remarkable individuals who have chosen to engage systemically and, in doing so, have helped create change at a scale that smaller, individual projects alone could never achieve. I am deeply grateful to them for sharing their experiences so generously and for their unwavering commitment to tackling some of India's most complex challenges. They are not merely donors; they are institution-builders, collaborators across sectors, and thoughtful risk-takers.

Across these stories, a clear pattern emerges. For many, there was a "turning point" – a realisation that working with the government could unlock a powerful multiplier on their impact, enabling lasting change at scale. Their deep commitment to a small number of thematic areas led them to confront the complexity of the problems they were tackling – and, in turn, to adopt a systemic lens and back these causes with patient, long-term capital. Their approaches also reveal other common threads: investing in strong and diverse teams, and working collaboratively with other actors in the ecosystem, whether through co-funding models or backing System Support Organisations (SSOs).

My understanding of systemic impact emerged from my own journey in education through the founding of the Central Square Foundation. Through sustained engagements with state

and central governments, I witnessed the true leverage of philanthropy – in reforming policy frameworks, building capacity within the system, and setting robust implementation processes. Although direct programmes are critical to create immediate impact, I came to realise that reaching every child in a sustainable way requires strengthening the systems that deliver services at scale.

This belief led to the creation of The Convergence Foundation (TCF) in 2021. Today, the TCF network has expanded to 24 mission-driven organizations that work at the system level to move the needle on complex issues and create impact at scale. The approach has remained consistent – building exceptional teams with diverse capabilities and backing bold, long-term bets where philanthropy can act as catalytic capital. One such effort is SCALE, an initiative designed to strengthen systemic philanthropy in India. Together with Accelerate Indian Philanthropy (AIP), SCALE aims to provide advisory support, curated investment opportunities, and spaces for peer learning – helping more philanthropists move from intent to impact at scale.

The philanthropists featured in this book, along with many others, have profoundly shaped my own thinking. This collection is a small tribute to their leadership. Their stories offer both inspiration and practical pathways for those beginning to explore systemic giving. A portfolio mindset can be a helpful starting point: balancing programmatic investments with a meaningful allocation to systemic efforts, and allowing that balance to evolve as conviction and capability grow.

This book is an invitation to reflect deeply, to think boldly, and to imagine what becomes possible when wealth is used not only to give, but to transform. Together, we can commit to giving systemically and shape the next phase of India's development. ●

"...Reaching every child in a sustainable way requires strengthening the systems that deliver services at scale."

About the Organizations

Accelerate Indian Philanthropy

AIP is a peer network created by philanthropists, for philanthropists, working to build a vibrant culture of giving in India. It inspires and enables wealth creators to give more, sooner, and more effectively.

The idea of AIP was conceived in 2021 by Ashish Dhawan, Rohini Nilekani, and Amit Chandra, with Vishal Tulsyan and Harish & Bina Shah later joining as Core Founders. Today, the network includes over 50 additional Founders who actively support AIP's mission to strengthen and scale purposeful philanthropy in the country.

SCALE

SCALE enables funders, nonprofits, and government leaders to collectively create systemic impact. Our mission is to strengthen India's systemic impact ecosystem by galvanising domestic capital toward high-potential systemic solutions in partnership with government champions, and building the capabilities of the organisations driving them.

SCALE guides funders in making their portfolio allocation more systemic through technical advisory and high-quality investable opportunities, supports SSOs in strengthening their capacity to implement systemic initiatives, and identifies government champions who will be partners in systemic initiatives for their policy priorities.

The Convergence Foundation

The Convergence Foundation (TCF) seeks to be a powerful catalyst in India's growth and development journey. Founded by Ashish and Manisha Dhawan, TCF aims to leverage philanthropy to transform the lives of all Indians through rapid and sustained economic growth and inclusive development. To advance this vision, TCF focuses on three key domains viz., accelerating economic growth, enhancing human capital, and advancing development enablers. Central to our approach is a belief in Systems Change, recognising that population-level impact requires mission-driven institutions that adopt a nonlinear approach and work in close partnership with the government to address structural challenges.

TCF incubates, supports, and nurtures these pioneering institutions that align with our North Star and vision: driving large-scale, transformative impact. The TCF network now includes over 20 non-profit organisations dedicated to addressing India's biggest challenges. These organisations address critical capacity gaps, inform policymaking, and introduce innovative solutions, working in close partnership with governments at various levels.

India Impact Sherpas

India Impact Sherpas is an Advisory Services firm focused on the social sector. They work with Changemakers and Philanthropists to accelerate and amplify development outcomes. In addition to working with individual organisations, they believe in sharing knowledge and insights on how to create systemic impact, which can have a multiplier effect on the development sector and the nation.

Ajay Piramal

Path to Purpose

Ajay Piramal doesn't speak about philanthropy in terms of charity or giving back. For him, it's an act of service—*Sewa Bhaav*—a Sanskrit expression that means to serve selflessly, joyfully, and with compassion. That principle, instilled in him by his grandfather and father, anchors both his business ethos and his leadership at the Piramal Foundation.

L ong known as the Chairman of the Piramal Group, he has built one of India's most respected business houses. Yet it is his role in shaping large-scale development initiatives across some of the country's poorest states that he speaks about with the most fervour. "Philanthropy has always been about becoming an instrument of the divine," he says. "It's not about giving, but about becoming part of something larger that creates meaningful change."

A Legacy of Social Impact

The seeds of Piramal's philanthropic outlook were sown early. He recalls walking through remote tribal belts and spending time with Gandhi Fellows in rural Rajasthan—not as a guest, but as a participant. These experiences left an indelible impression. "There hasn't been a single turning point," he says. "Rather, a tapestry of experiences—each one deepening my belief that lasting change requires proximity, courage, and patience."

His family's legacy of social investment began generations ago—his grandfather started a school in Rajasthan in the 1920s; his father followed by founding a college. "They believed education was the most powerful tool for transformation," Piramal says. That same conviction would later guide the Foundation's early work with the government's Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan campaign in Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan—a project that marked his first foray into aligning grassroots action with national policy.

But Piramal quickly learned that direct service alone couldn't solve deeply rooted inequities. "Systemic gaps—not just lack of resources— were holding back outcomes in education, health, and governance," he says. That realisation became the cornerstone of a new strategy.

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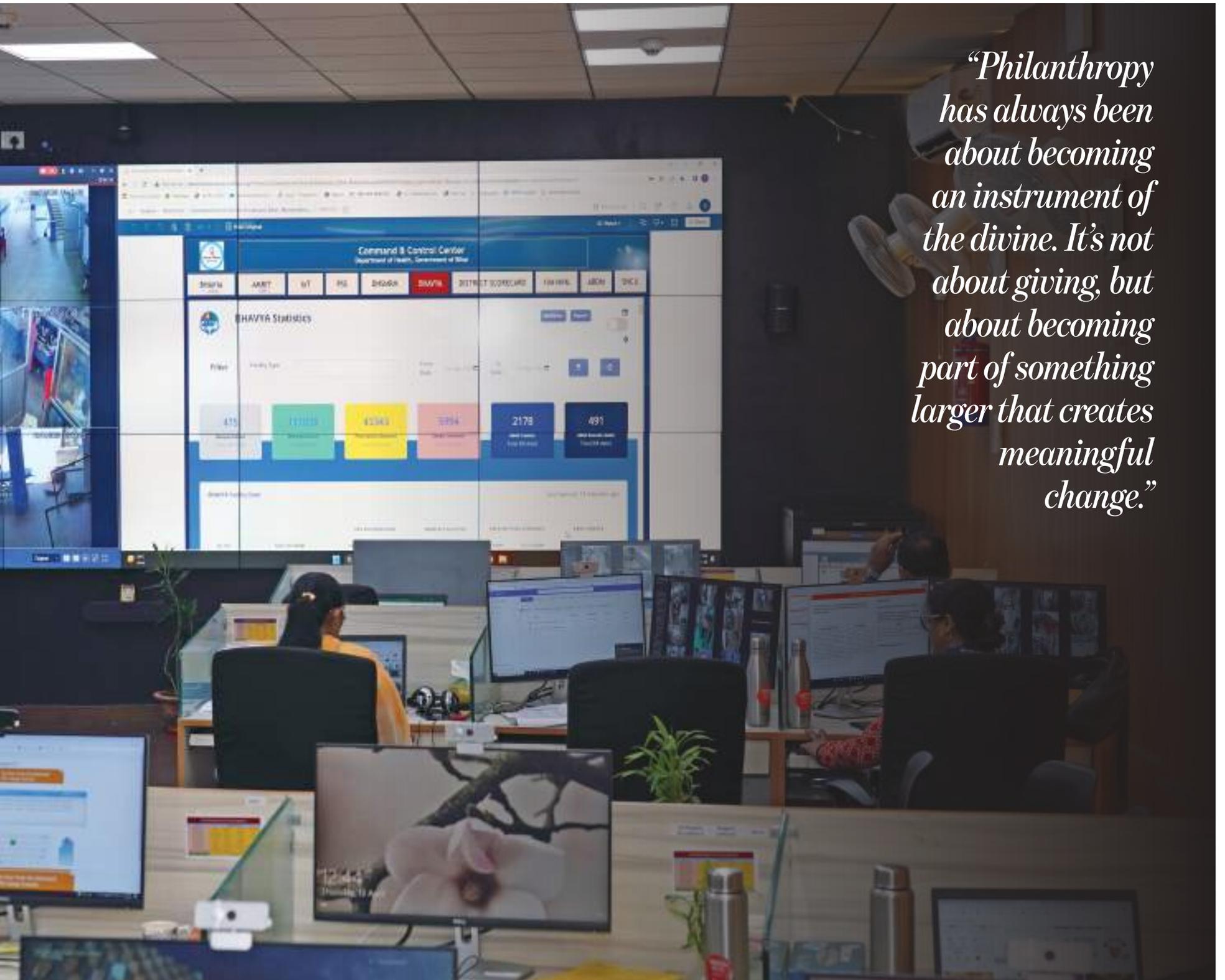
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"For every rupee we invest in innovation," he says, "the government invests ₹10 to ₹15 to take it to scale."

Scaling Systems, Not Just Schools

Piramal's approach to philanthropy has evolved from direct aid to what he calls systemic giving—an effort to support the core architecture of governance and service delivery. "It's not about running parallel systems to the government," he says. "It's about complementing and catalysing what already exists in the wider development ecosystem."

That philosophy has translated into action through four strategic pillars: Decentralisation, Inclusion, Digitisation, and Leadership Development. Whether it's education or healthcare, the Foundation's interventions focus on reinforcing what he describes as "critical systems": information systems, talent systems, community systems, and inclusion systems.

"India has made progress on upstream innovations—vaccines, diagnostics, protocols. But the midstream delivery, especially in rural areas, still struggles," Piramal says. "What's missing is institutional capacity." The solution, he says, is not just money, but in demonstrating discipline and design thinking so that they can be embedded and scaled within governance structures. "We bring in the rigour of business—performance tracking, agile iterations, and user-centred design."

One of the clearest examples of this strategy is the Swasthya Samiksha Kendras—Command and Control Centres in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, funded and designed by the Piramal Foundation. These facilities harness real-time data from over 4,000 CCTV feeds, IoT devices, and more than 20 dashboards to monitor and improve healthcare delivery across districts. "Health outcomes in these states weren't only suffering because of funding shortfalls," Piramal says. "They were suffering because feedback loops were broken. Decisions were reactive, not proactive."

The result: health governance is now being prioritised at the same level as disease outbreaks. "We helped the system see itself," Piramal says. "That's the beginning of transformation."

Scaling with the State

Rather than viewing the government as a stakeholder to be bypassed, Piramal sees it as philanthropy's most powerful partner. The Foundation's strategy hinges on unlocking what he calls the multiplier effect of the state.

"For every rupee we invest in innovation," he says, "the government invests ₹10 to ₹15 to take it to scale." It's a high-leverage model—and one that requires deep, trust-based relationships. Piramal's teams are

"When philanthropy moves from doing for to doing with, it becomes something truly transformative."

embedded within government departments, supporting them in building capacity, training frontline workers, and co-creating frameworks for sustainable impact.

And their geographic focus is unflinching as they focus on aspirational districts in states like Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Assam, Bihar, and Odisha. "These are places with difficult terrain, limited state capacity, and communities that are often overlooked," he says. "Yet they represent India's greatest opportunity for inclusive development."

Advice for New Givers

For those just starting their philanthropic journey, Piramal offers three pieces of advice. First: Don't just give, build. "Philanthropy should strengthen systems and build capabilities that endure," he says. That requires patient capital, long-term commitment, and partnerships rooted in mutual trust.

Second: Have courage, and cultivate patience. "Real change is messy, slow, and uncertain," he says. "The greatest transformation often happens in places most people are unwilling to go."

And third: Let *Sewa Bhaav* be your compass. Impact isn't just about how much is done—it's about what truly changes. "Track outcomes, not just activities," he says. "Ask if systems got stronger, if lives actually improved."

For Piramal, the line between business and service has always been porous. His life's mission, as he puts it, is guided not by metrics alone, but by meaning. "When philanthropy moves from doing for to doing with," he says, "it becomes something truly transformative." ●
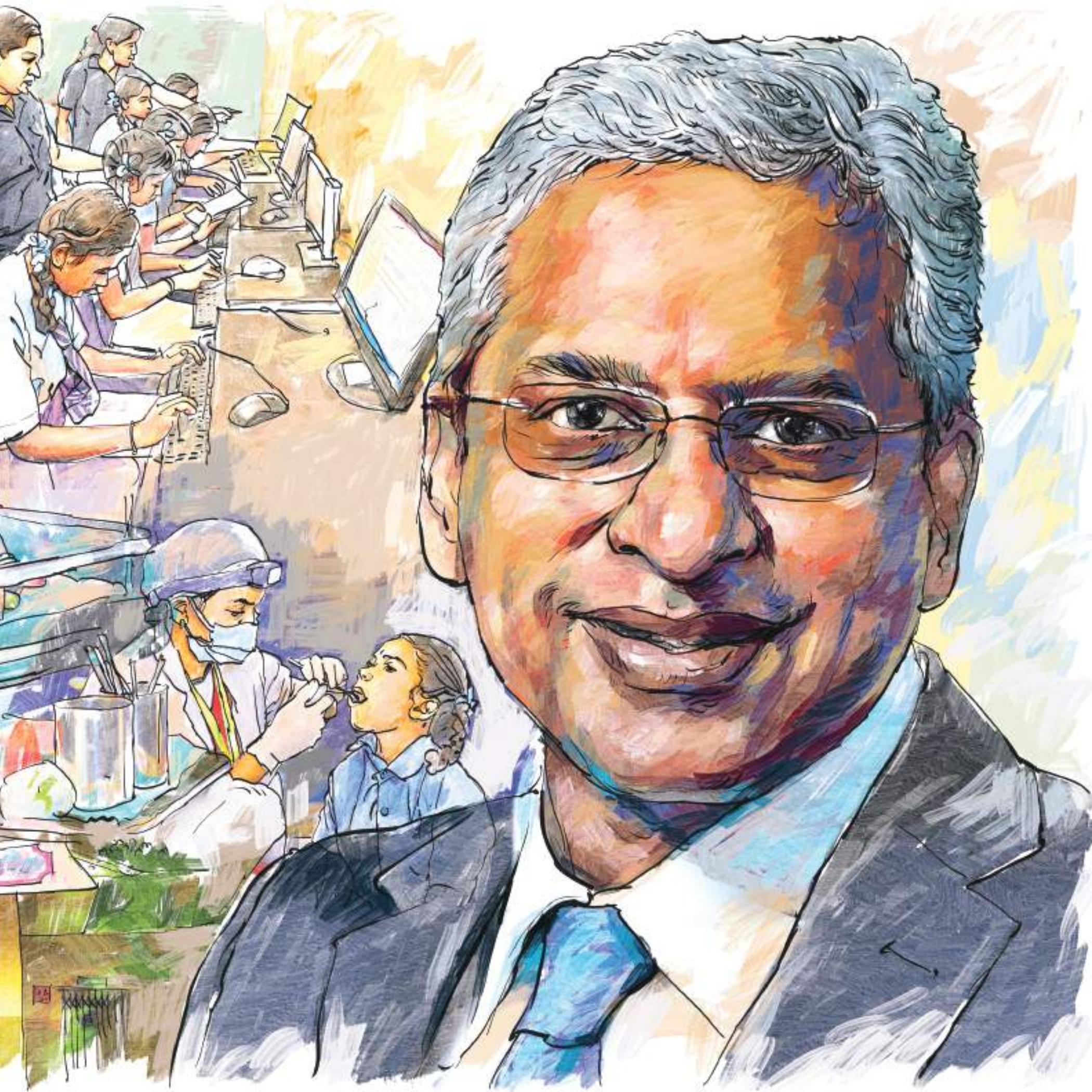
Ajit Isaac

Personal Conviction to Public Infrastructure

Ajit Isaac's philanthropic instinct was seeded not in a boardroom, but in the rhythms of his childhood in Chennai. Raised in a Christian household, he grew up with the discipline of tithing—setting aside a portion of one's income as an act of faith.

I t wasn't formal charity. It was organic. Natural. "It wasn't a calculated act," he says. "It was part of life." That early exposure to habitual giving shaped his approach not just to money, but to time, connections, and care. As his entrepreneurial career gathered momentum—culminating in the founding of Quess Corp, a workforce services giant—Ajit's values evolved from personal conviction into institutional commitment.

Quess's CSR arm, Quess Foundation (Formerly Careworks Foundation), emerged with a focus on government schools. With over 600,000 employees across three companies, Ajit noticed a pattern: many of their children were enrolled in public schools near Bengaluru—often in poor conditions, and many struggling to reach college due to foundational gaps. "We saw too many kids dropping out," he says. "They weren't being prepared well enough." That realisation became the spark behind the Foundation's mission to upgrade public school infrastructure, strengthen teacher capacity, and support student wellbeing. Over the years, this intervention supported 76 schools across 2 states, impacting 1.15 lakh children.

What started as local school interventions soon revealed a deeper truth: with intensity and continuity, community-focused investments could unlock long-term transformation. "That left an impression in my mind," Ajit says. "If we do things taking a systemic lens and there's an institutionalised approach to using economic resources, the outcomes can be better."

From Fixing Gaps to Building Systems

Over time, Ajit's philanthropy began to shift. It became less about fixing gaps and more about strengthening systems. His philanthropy
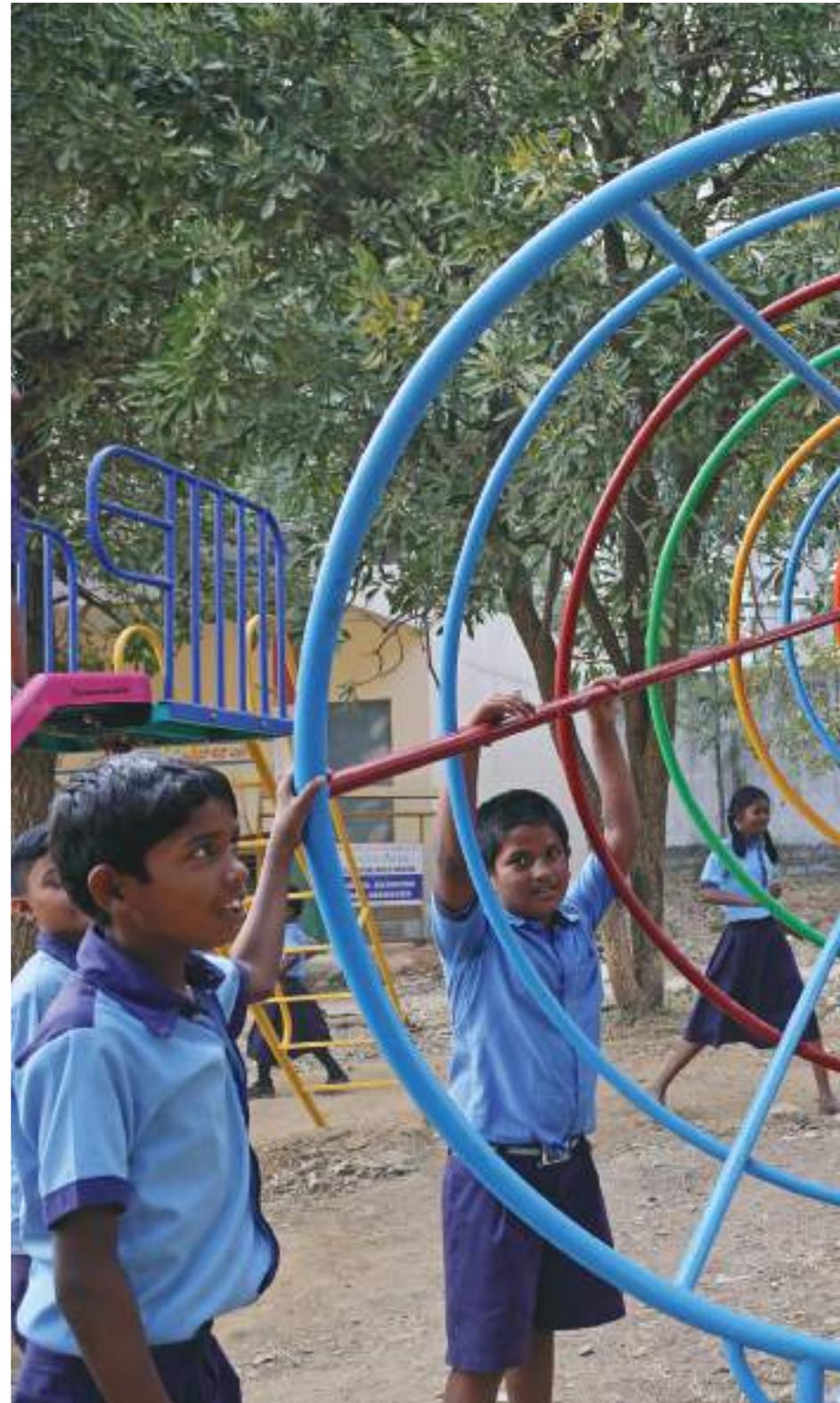
*"If we do things
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lens and there's an
institutionalised
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gradually came to centre on institutions that could strengthen public systems, generate knowledge, and deliver impact at a population level. His philosophy became clear: identify a critical societal gap, find a high-capacity institutional partner, and back them with long-term capital, credibility, and autonomy. One such bet was on the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) in Bengaluru.

While IISc is renowned for scientific research, public health was not traditionally its strong suit. That was precisely why Ajit backed the creation of its Centre for Public Health—a bold initiative co-located within a medical school and a pure sciences university to bring big data capacity and strong scientific rigour to crucial public health issues. "We wanted to help them expand their capabilities," he says, "and bridge the gap at a national level."

Ajit doesn't believe in replicating capacity where it already exists. Instead, he backs external leaders and institutions with deep domain expertise, placing his trust—and his capital—in those best positioned to lead. Often, these are high-risk, long-gestation projects others shy away from. But Ajit is comfortable being the early backer—the one who steps in when outcomes aren't guaranteed, and visibility is low.

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₹340+ Crore
Committed
(since 2020-21)

75%
Institution-
Building

Multiple
CoEs Seed
Funded

Institution-Building for Tomorrow

At the heart of Ajit's approach lies a belief in the power of institutions—not just individuals—to drive enduring change. His giving is structured like a carefully designed portfolio, not scattered across causes. Whether it's public health, legal policy, or governance, he bets on excellence, talent, and staying power.

Beyond the Isaac Centre for Public Health (ICPH), his public health investments include the Sports and Society Accelerator, which explores how physical activity can serve as preventative healthcare and strengthen community wellbeing. In the realm of policy and reform, he supports institutions such as the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, the PUCAR Collective, and the Isaac Centre for Public Policy at Ashoka University. All are working to reimagine India's legal, policy, and administrative frameworks. To Ajit, these are not quick fixes—they are 10, 20, or 50-year bets. "Systemic change doesn't come from doing many small things," he says. "It comes from building the public infrastructure for the future."

Work with State, Not Around It

Ajit is clear-eyed about one thing: there is no true systemic change in India without the government. Philanthropy, he believes, must learn to work with the state—not circumvent it. "You have to work with the government," he says. "You have to be able to analyse policy, create data and check patterns." The government, he emphasises, brings scale, mandate, and the delivery mechanisms needed to make ideas real. It's slow. Sometimes frustrating. But necessary. He points to initiatives like the Economic Growth Collaborative (EGC)—a platform that brings funders together to support public systems—as examples of how philanthropy can align with government for large-scale impact.

"Systemic change doesn't come from doing many small things, it comes from building the public infrastructure of the future."

Lessons for New Generation Givers

Ajit's giving is neither impulsive nor purely intuitive. It's shaped by decades of entrepreneurial experience, guided by realism, and executed with rigor. He often shares four key lessons for those considering a deeper philanthropic path:

- *Patient Capital*: Be in the game for the long run and support causes with the patience knowing it's not a sprint but a marathon.
- *Start Early*: Begin giving early in life. "Let it become a mindset," he says. "There's joy in seeing something grow over time."
- *Give Systematically*: Structured portfolios, not scattershot donations, are the way forward. Pick a few areas and stay for the long haul.
- *Collaborate for Scale*: No funder can do it alone – join collaboratives, share learnings and take risks together.

And perhaps most importantly: accept failure. "Not every bet will work," Ajit admits. "But the only way to move India's development agenda forward is to bet—with courage—on ideas, institutions, and people." ●
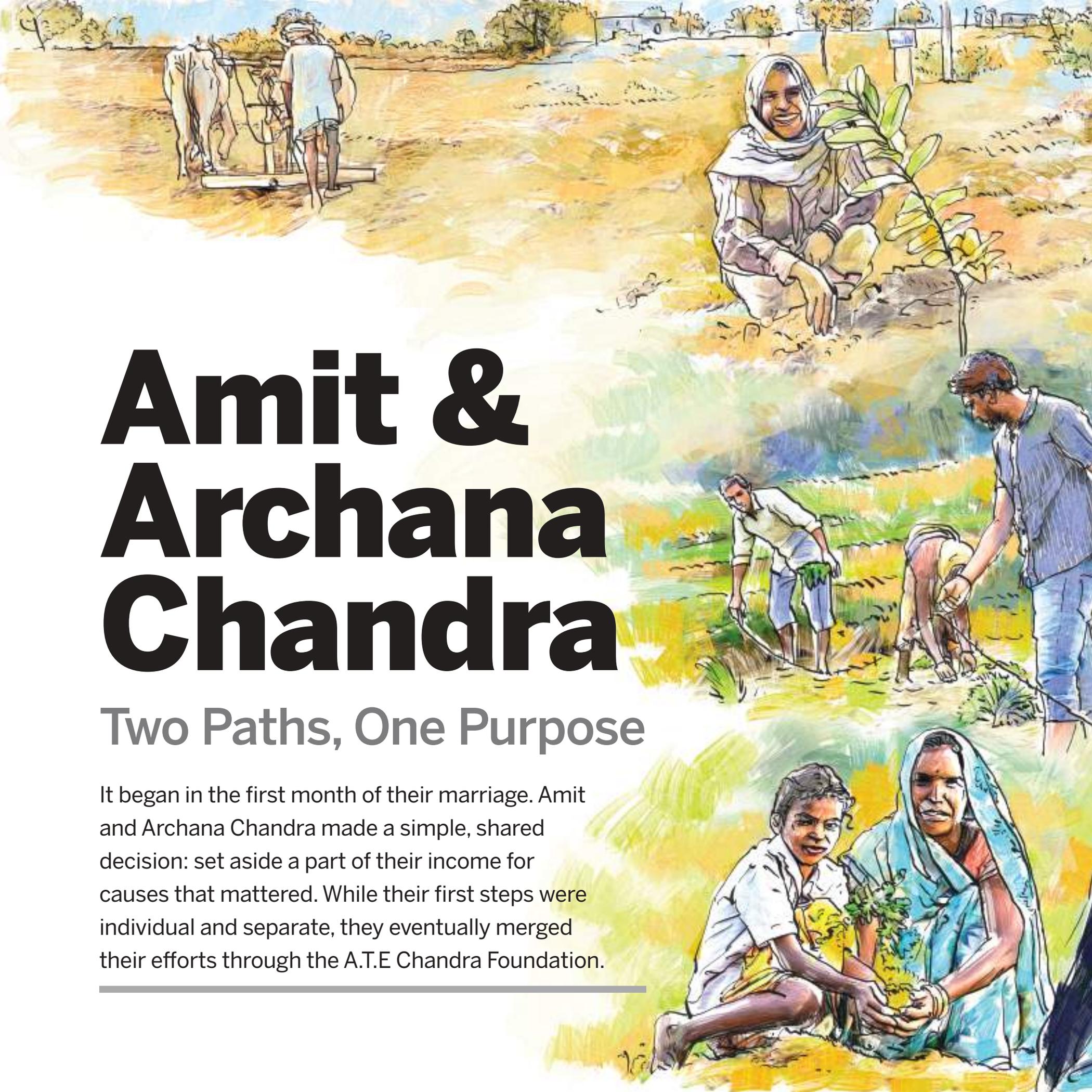
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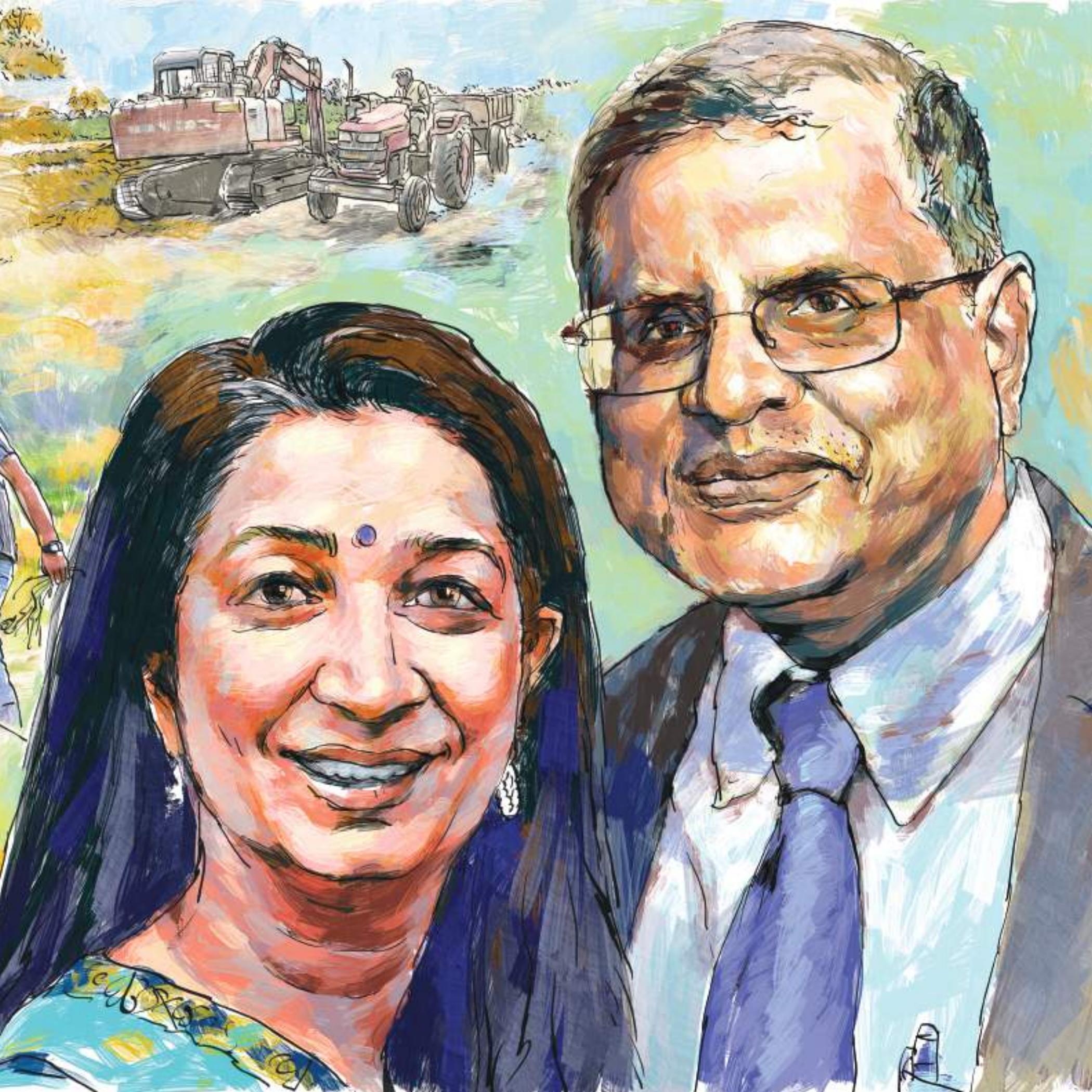
Two Paths, One Purpose

It began in the first month of their marriage. Amit and Archana Chandra made a simple, shared decision: set aside a part of their income for causes that mattered. While their first steps were individual and separate, they eventually merged their efforts through the A.T.E Chandra Foundation.

A rchana was deeply shaped by her grandmother's quiet philosophy of "neki kar aur kuein mein daal"—do good and forget it. Amit, who drew inspiration from Guru Nanak's teachings and modern philanthropists like Chuck Feeney, believed in thoughtful giving and institution-building.

Amit joined non-profit boards and engaged with organizations working in poverty alleviation. Archana, after leaving the corporate sector, spent several years at Akanksha Foundation, and eventually found her calling at the Jai Vakeel Foundation, an institution working with children with intellectual disabilities. Eventually, their efforts merged with the founding of the A.T.E Chandra Foundation (ATECF), the philanthropic vehicle they co-created to sharpen their focus, drive a cohesive strategy, and scale what worked.

From Local Relief to Systemic Change

In the early years, health and education were priority areas for the foundation. Then came a turning point. In 2013, during a severe drought in Maharashtra, Amit began working on water conservation. But instead of the conventional—and expensive—methods like building dams or canals, his team tried something deceptively simple: desilt existing water bodies, return the nutrient-rich soil to farmers, and restore the tanks' water-holding capacity.

The idea took off. Cost-effective, scalable, and deeply beneficial, it soon became the foundation of a much larger mission. Today, ATECF's "Rejuvenation of Waterbodies" programme, in collaboration with state governments, NITI Aayog, NGOs and other donors, operates across thirteen states—Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya
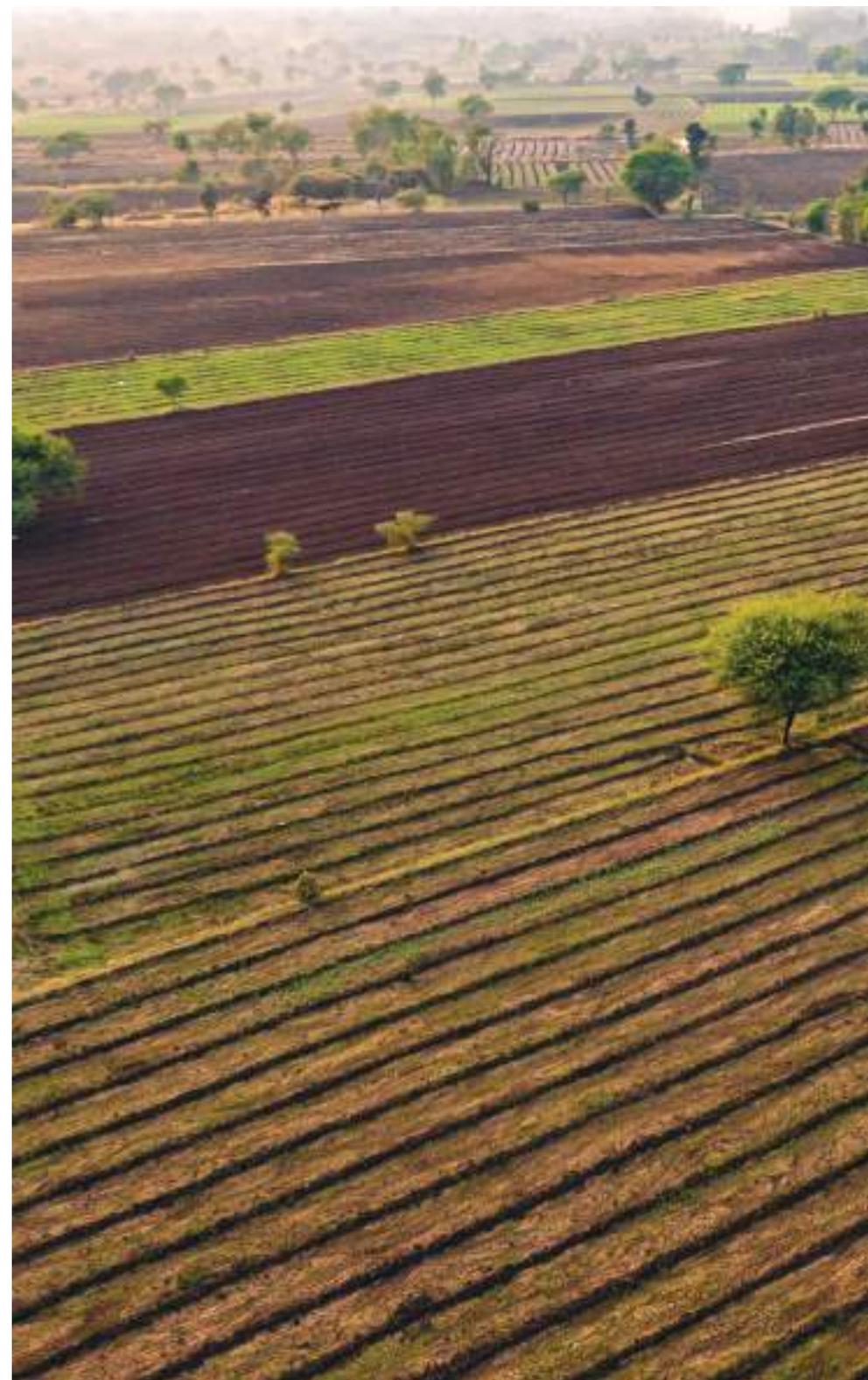
Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Jharkhand, Odisha, and Karnataka, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Chattisgarh and Punjab. It's now one of the largest water rejuvenation programmes in India.

"This was when we realised the power of working at scale," Amit says. "You don't need attribution when impact is the goal."

Patient Innovation, Quiet Disruption

While Amit's breakthrough in water conservation scaled quickly, Archana's work required deeper patience. At Jai Vakeel, she was struck by a hard truth: with 2% of India's population living with intellectual disabilities, lasting change wasn't possible without engaging the system.

Rather than rushing into partnerships, Jai Vakeel spent four years developing and refining a standardised curriculum tailored to children with intellectual disabilities. Only after rigorous testing did they approach the Maharashtra government. The result: today, that curriculum is being used in over 465 special schools across the state.

Validated further by the National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (NIEPID), the curriculum is now poised to go national. The Chandras never sought credit— just adoption.

"It's about creating a proof of concept robust enough for government to take and run with," Archana says. "You have to be okay with the solution flying without your name attached to it."

The two domains—water and disability—highlight their different styles. Amit, more extroverted and quick to iterate, gravitated toward solutions that could scale rapidly. Archana, reflective and meticulous,

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Jai Vakeel

Schools	2019	03
	2025	450+
Children	2019	700
	2025	20,000

ATECF Water Project
Share of philanthropic capital reducing over the years, making the programme more self-sustaining

FY 2021-22 **100%**   FY 2023-24 **12%**   FY 2025-26 **1.9%**

worked in a field where public systems were slower and trust needed to be earned over time. Yet both knew that for real transformation, public sector engagement was non-negotiable.

Scaling with the State

The Chandras are unequivocal about the role of government in creating lasting change. "Yes, it's tough to engage with the government," Amit says. "But when you do, you can see transformation at a scale that you cannot achieve in a lifetime."

He believes many underestimate the openness of officials. "Once you have a credible idea and data to back it, most government departments are actually receptive."

Archana brings in pragmatism—and humour. "If your husband snores, he snores," she says. "You don't get stuck on it. You just get on with the programme." For her, learning to accept the "quirks of the land" is part of the process.

Their experience has shaped a strategy that mixes high-risk, high-return bets with patient preparation. Amit urges boldness: "Analysis paralysis is the biggest disease that infects people. Just start. Once you get your teeth in, you'll want to get your body wet."

And once you start, he says, data becomes your best friend. "Having a data orientation is very, very important for us—it's the only way to build scale and bring in the tech tools and platforms that enable it."

Lessons from the Journey

As co-founders, spouses and mission partners, the Chandras have developed a rhythm of shared giving that balances their temperaments and strengths. Their foundation operates like a dynamic portfolio: fast-moving in some areas, deeply experimental in others.

They have a few simple lessons for those beginning their own philanthropic path. Find your heart's song. "Try different causes and see which one makes your heart sing," Archana says. That emotional connect, she says, is what will sustain people through the inevitable setbacks.

Give as a family. Their joint work thrives on difference. But at ATECF, they make space for all voices. "We debate a lot, but once a decision is made, we all align behind it," Archana says. "Mutual respect, underlined with love—that's the key."

Prioritise capacity building. At ATECF, a major focus is on investing in people, systems, and technology to solve problems at scale.

And above all, don't go it alone. "It's a lot more fun doing these things with like-minded people," Amit says. "I've made more friends in the social sector than I ever did in my corporate life."

For the Chandras, the journey isn't about recognition or reward. It's about shaping systems that outlive them. And it all began with one promise, made quietly, in the early days of a marriage: to give, and keep giving. ●

"Analysis paralysis is the biggest disease that infects people. Just start. Once you get your teeth in, you'll want to get your body wet."
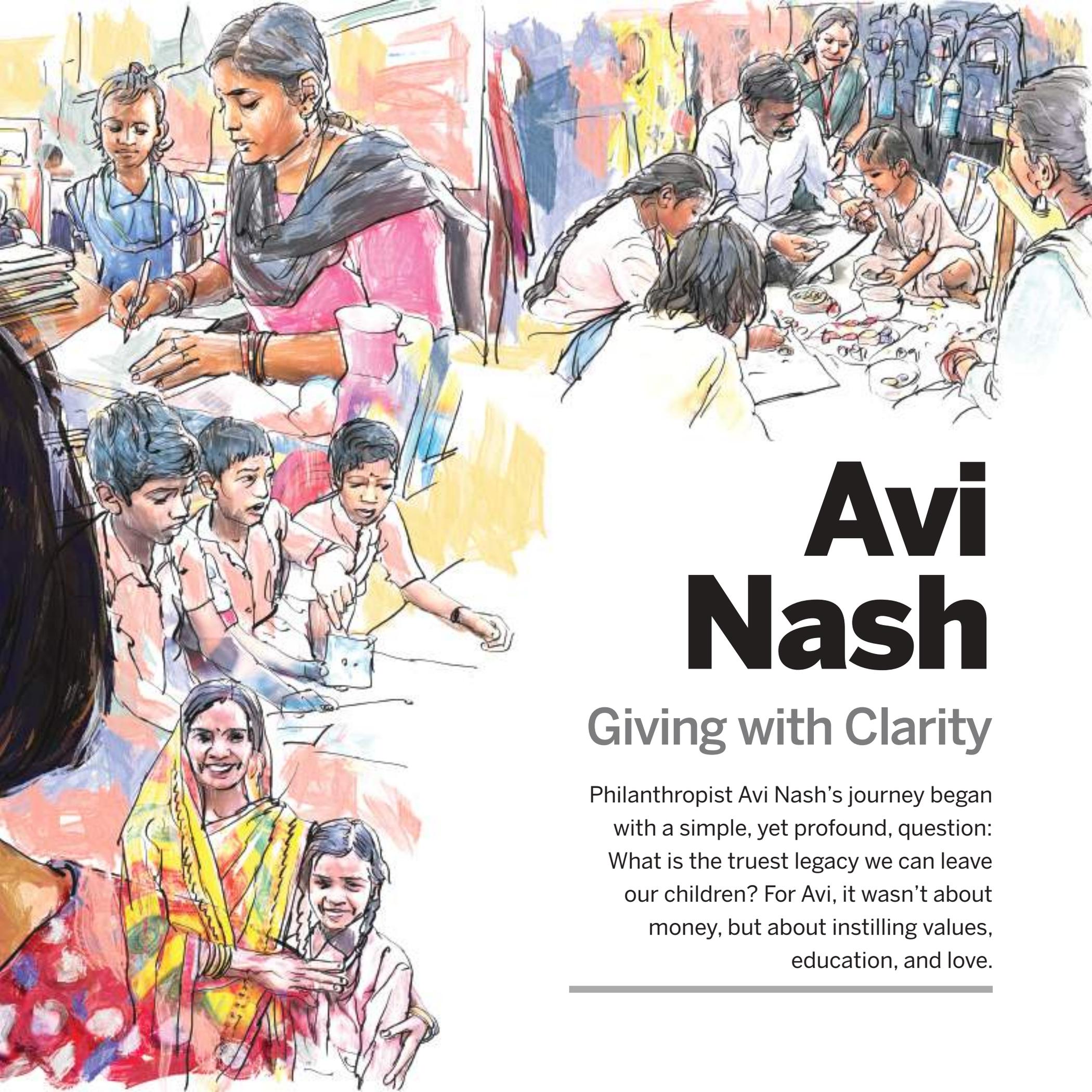
Avi Nash

Giving with Clarity

Philanthropist Avi Nash's journey began with a simple, yet profound, question: What is the truest legacy we can leave our children? For Avi, it wasn't about money, but about instilling values, education, and love.

H is giving philosophy, born from a family history of kindness and opportunity, has evolved from well-intentioned acts of charity to a strategic pursuit of systemic change.

A Family's Quiet Legacy

Avi's philanthropic path is deeply personal. It's built on the stories of his father, who, as a boy in rural India, received a chance at an education because of the generosity of those who believed in him. This experience instilled in him and his family—the Manudhanes—a deep-seated belief in the power of opportunity and the responsibility to pay it forward.

The path from this foundational belief to his current work was marked by a series of inflection points. After becoming a partner at Goldman Sachs, a family health crisis forced him to confront the fragility of life. This, combined with his father's decision to give away 90% of his wealth, solidified a core belief: "Joy lies not in consumption, but in purposeful giving." Avi felt this was a more valuable inheritance for his children than wealth alone.

From Heart to Head

Initially, Avi's giving was heartfelt but, as he candidly admits, not always effective. He followed a linear, step-by-step approach: fund effective programmes, make them cost-effective, sustain, and then scale. He learned a hard lesson when this "engineer's logic" often led to failure.

This realisation prompted a radical shift. Today, Avi and his family operate on a "P1-P2-P3" model: Prototype, Propagate, and Proliferate. Their approach is now anchored in measurable outcomes and impact,

"Joy lies not in consumption, but in purposeful giving." Avi felt this was a more valuable inheritance for his children than wealth alone.

THE MULTIPLIER EFFECT

Udaan Initiative

65 Fixed-schedule Mental Health Service Points

52 Managed by the District Mental Health Program (DMHP) team

6,22,431 People screened, achieving **86%** of the target

not just the initial effort. A key insight was learning to embrace the "optimal over ideal"—rejecting the pursuit of perfect, isolated solutions in favour of embedding change within existing systems. "Perfect is the enemy of good, and therefore optimal is good enough," Avi says. "Don't worry about ideal, it'll never happen."

Embracing Government Partnerships

A vital shift in Avi's thinking was the realisation that the government must be a central partner, not an obstacle. This philosophy is evident in his support for two major initiatives in India: Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) through the Central Square Foundation (CSF) and mental health through Udaan.

He sees CSF as a standout for its ambition and its deep integration with government systems. Their focus on improving literacy and numeracy for children in grades 1-3 aligns with the family's own interest in the 3-10 age group. Similarly, Udaan, a mental health programme in Maharashtra, began as a prototype in Nagpur and has since secured government commitment for state-level expansion. The programme uses community leaders to screen for mental health issues and links patients to government-supported treatment hubs. The Indira Foundation,

"Perfect is the enemy of good, and therefore optimal is good enough," Avi says. *"Don't worry about ideal, it'll never happen."*

led by Avi's family, stepped in at a crucial time to support Udaan, helping it grow into a scalable, systems-integrated model.

"You cannot be there 20 years from now, continuing to do handholding," Avi says. "But if you can embed yourself in the DNA, partly through content, partly through processes, partly through training...that's what I call embedding in the DNA."

Lessons in Humility

Avi's advice to fellow philanthropists is grounded in his own experience. First and foremost, he stresses that less is more. Focus is essential. He also advises patience, the courage to say no when something isn't working, and above all, humility. He champions the "experiment-assess-tweak" cycle, likening philanthropy to a feedback loop that requires continuous learning.

He encourages working with trusted advisors, conducting field visits, and embracing a data-driven approach. While he resists the spotlight, he insists the credit lies with his family's values and the collaborative efforts of those on the ground. For Avi, giving is not just about making an external impact. It's a deeply fulfilling personal journey. "Giving has its own joy," he says, "and if you start, you'll see that for yourself." ●

Mirik Gogri

Philanthropy for a Changing Climate

Mirik Gogri's approach to philanthropy is shaped less by traditional charity, but through a family legacy of problem-solving. For him, giving is a mechanism to create systemic change, particularly in the area of climate change, where the problems are complex and interconnected.
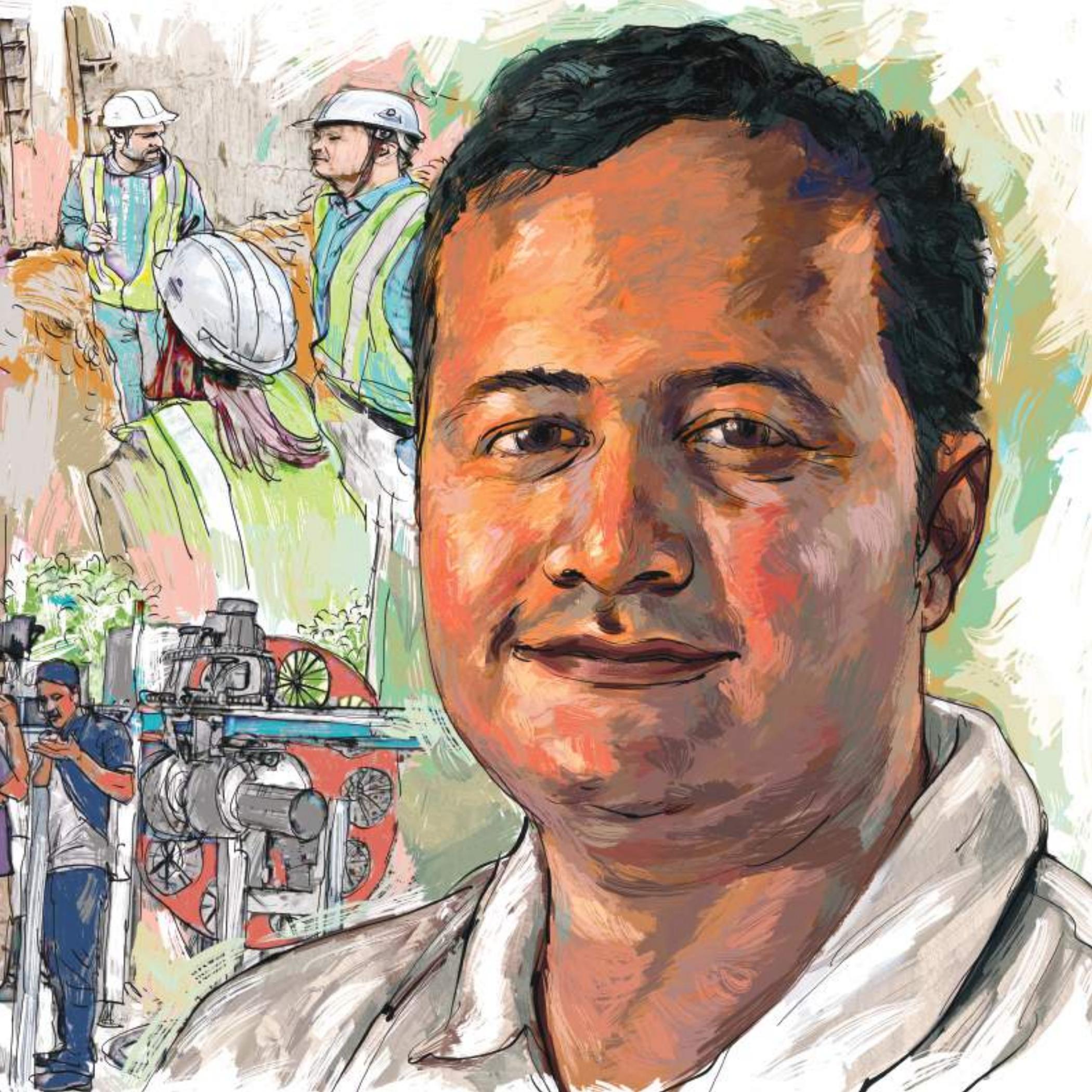
H e sees his role not as a benefactor, but as a catalyst – deploying philanthropic grants and patient capital to build the infrastructure needed for a sustainable future. His clear focus on climate change emerged from the legacy of his family's work.

Family Legacy of Problem Solving

The Gogri family's journey into formal philanthropy began in 2015, but it was in 2019 that Mirik Gogri, with a background in material science, began deploying capital with clear intent. Rather than choosing a conventional focus such as education, climate emerged as a natural fit. Its complex and technical challenges resonated with the family's deep-rooted expertise in manufacturing and engineering.

This was not a passive shift. It was a deliberate move to apply domain knowledge toward public good. The family viewed themselves as problem solvers first, and philanthropists second—blending philanthropy with early-stage investment to tackle climate challenges across different markets and technologies.

Climate's Systemic Imperative

Gogri's pivot to systemic philanthropy was an inherent demand of the climate sector itself. He quickly realised that linear and siloed solutions to problems like energy transition or sustainable agriculture were insufficient. Meaningful transformation required building entire ecosystems: creating new markets, influencing policy, fostering collaboration between academia and industry, and reorienting business models.

"Climate action is not about funding projects; it's about building ecosystems that make solutions viable at scale. Lasting climate impact demands patience for long-term outcomes and the conviction to fund early, riskier pilots that others avoid."

THE MULTIPLIER EFFECT

300 Cities

will be supported by the Thane Heat Action Plan under CEEW's Urban Heat Resilience Programme by 2027.

₹1 Crore

Budget allocation for Thane City in 2025-26, becoming the first city in India to earmark dedicated funds for a heat action plan.

His family office adopted a blended model, using high-risk private capital, grant funding, and patient investments, all aligned with the goal of building a robust climate ecosystem. For Gogri, the lines between his business and philanthropy blurred, as insights from his philanthropic work often informed his business decisions and vice versa.

Catalysing Infrastructure for Change

Gogri's systemic approach is best reflected in three flagship initiatives. He is a partner in developing Heat Action Plans with the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), working to embed climate

"What started as a single grant for one lab is now poised to become a nationwide platform for ecosystem building."

adaptation into local governance and secure long-term funding from government budgets.

He also founded Solving for Climate Action by Leveraging Ecosystem (SCALE), a non-profit aimed at helping climate-tech start-ups overcome the manufacturing scale-up gap by connecting them with manufacturers through platforms like expos.

Perhaps most ambitious is India's Translational Research Initiative (ITRI), a nation-wide, collaborative philanthropic initiative aiming to augment the translational research ecosystem and catalyse the lab-to-market journey of academic innovations. What started as a single grant for one lab is now poised to become a nationwide platform for ecosystem building. Across all these initiatives, the common thread is closing institutional or market gaps and building the infrastructure to create lasting, sustainable change.

Practical Wisdom

Gogri's advice to his peers is pragmatic and grounded. He urges philanthropists to "start small, but start", emphasising that real learning comes through action, not just analysis. He champions the funding of early-stage, high-risk ideas that often struggle to secure capital and cautions against rigid oversight that can stifle innovation.

He advocates for a portfolio approach to giving, similar to business strategy, diversifying across R&D, policy, and data infrastructure. Gogri believes that even for-profit family offices should dedicate patient capital to mission-driven market creation, particularly in the climate sector. For him, the true spirit of a philanthropic endeavour is to deeply understand and engage with a problem. ●
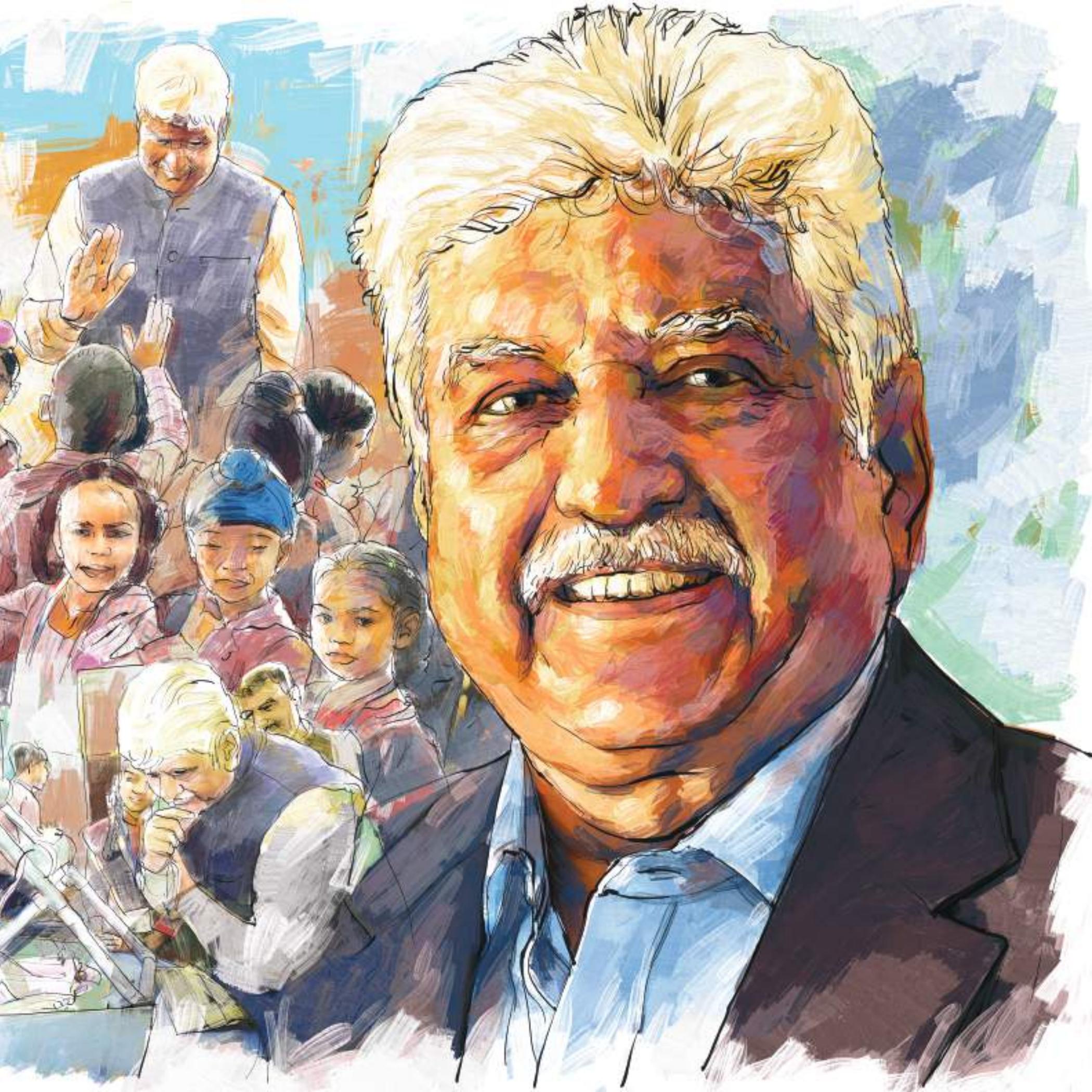
Rakesh Bharti Mittal

Mittal's Mission

Rakesh Bharti Mittal doesn't talk about philanthropy as a duty. He speaks of it as a lifelong commitment, shaped by the lessons of family, a deep sense of responsibility, and a firm belief in the power of education to uplift lives. "Giving," he says simply, "is a responsibility and commitment, not an obligation."

Long before Bharti became a telecommunications powerhouse, Mittal and his brothers were quietly funding scholarships for engineering and management students. There were no half-measures—students didn't receive partial support; they had their full tuition covered. The roots of that generosity run deep. His father, a man of politics and public life, was known in the community not just for his influence but for his open door. Watching him quietly support those in need left a lasting impression.

That personal sense of service eventually grew into the Bharti Airtel Foundation, which today stands at the forefront of educational philanthropy in India.

Personal Giving to Purposeful Action

Mittal's early efforts followed a familiar path: writing cheques, supporting good causes. But over time, he began to ask harder questions—about scale, sustainability, and what real impact looked like. The answer, he realised, lay in transforming education at its roots.

The Bharti Airtel Foundation initially focused on supporting premier institutions, funding the Bharti School of Telecommunication Technology & Management at IIT Delhi and the Bharti Centre for Communication at IIT Bombay. But a turning point came in 2006, when then Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh encouraged leading Indian business families to do more for primary education.

Mittal and his family responded by establishing Satya Bharti Schools—a network of rural schools offering free quality education, particularly for girl children and children from under-resourced communities. One day, while visiting one of these schools, Mittal asked
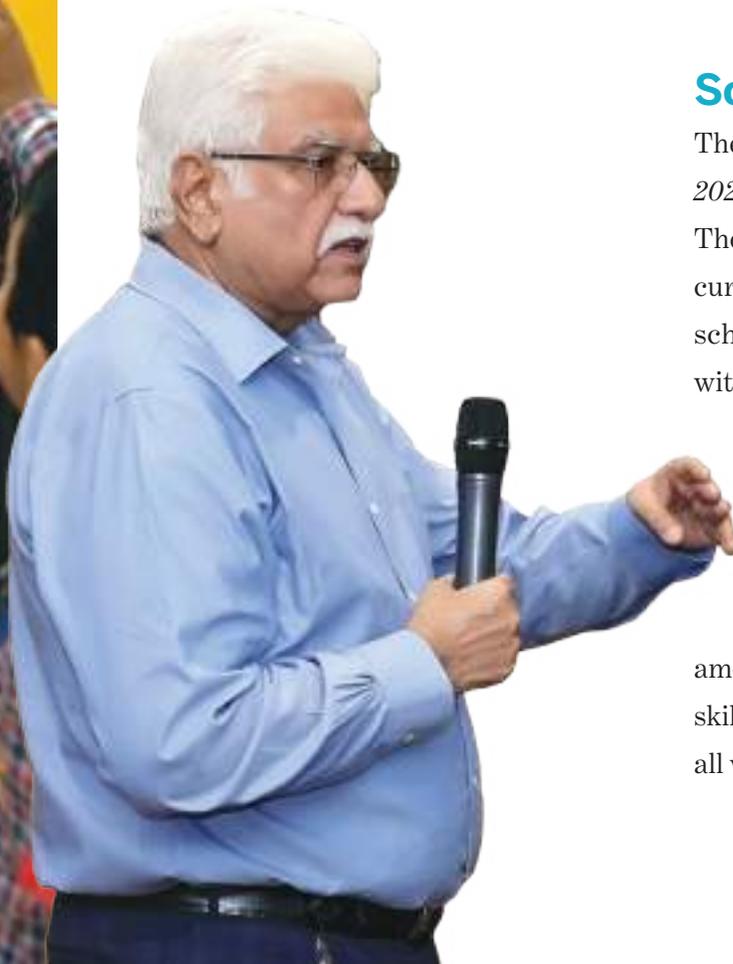
a young girl what she wanted to become. "An air hostess," she replied. He pressed further: which airline? Her answer came without hesitation—"IndiGo". Her clarity moved him. "That moment stayed with me," he says. Inspired, he arranged for IndiGo representatives to visit the school. What began as a conversation became a community-wide movement of hope and belief. "It reminded me what education can spark—even in the remotest corners."

Scaling Systems, Not Just Schools

The Satya Bharti Schools, now numbering 155 (*Data as on December 2025*) and spread across rural India, offer more than academics. They embed values, health education, and civic awareness into the curriculum. Mittal however understood that as successful as these schools were, true transformation would come only by working with the public education system.

That insight led to the launch of the Quality Support Program (QSP)—an initiative designed to partner with government schools to drive systemic change. Today, the QSP works with more than 1,100 (*Data as on December 2025*) government schools across multiple states. The programme strengthens leadership among principals, develops teachers' capacities, builds 21st century skills among children, and fosters greater community engagement— all with the aim of strengthening school ecosystems from the inside.

THE MULTIPLIER EFFECT

Satya Bharti School Program

155 Schools in Four States

**36.5K+** Students

1.3K+ Teachers

Quality Support Program (QSP)

1.1K Schools in 12 States/UTs

4.35L+ Students

18.7K+ Teachers

TheTeacherApp

190K+ Active Users

PAN-India Coverage
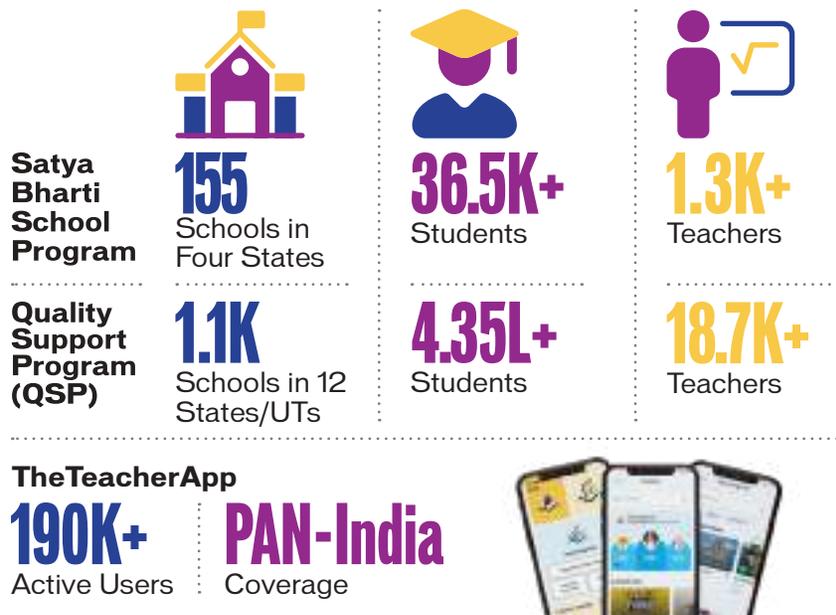
Data as on December 2025

Power of Public Good

As the education landscape evolved, Mittal recognised an opportunity to harness the power of technology to further support school teachers by making high-quality, scalable training resources more easily accessible, in line with the National Education Policy. This insight led to the creation of TheTeacherApp—a free for life, mobile-first platform co-developed by educators to support pedagogy, lesson planning, and ongoing professional development.

Already used by over 190,000+ (*Data as on December 2025*) teachers, TheTeacherApp is now being adopted by state governments and integrated into teacher training frameworks. "The idea was to create a true public good—something freely available, practical, and scalable," Mittal says. Whether through physical schools or digital tools, his approach has been consistent: strengthen what exists, amplify what works, and stay anchored in the lived realities of educators and students.
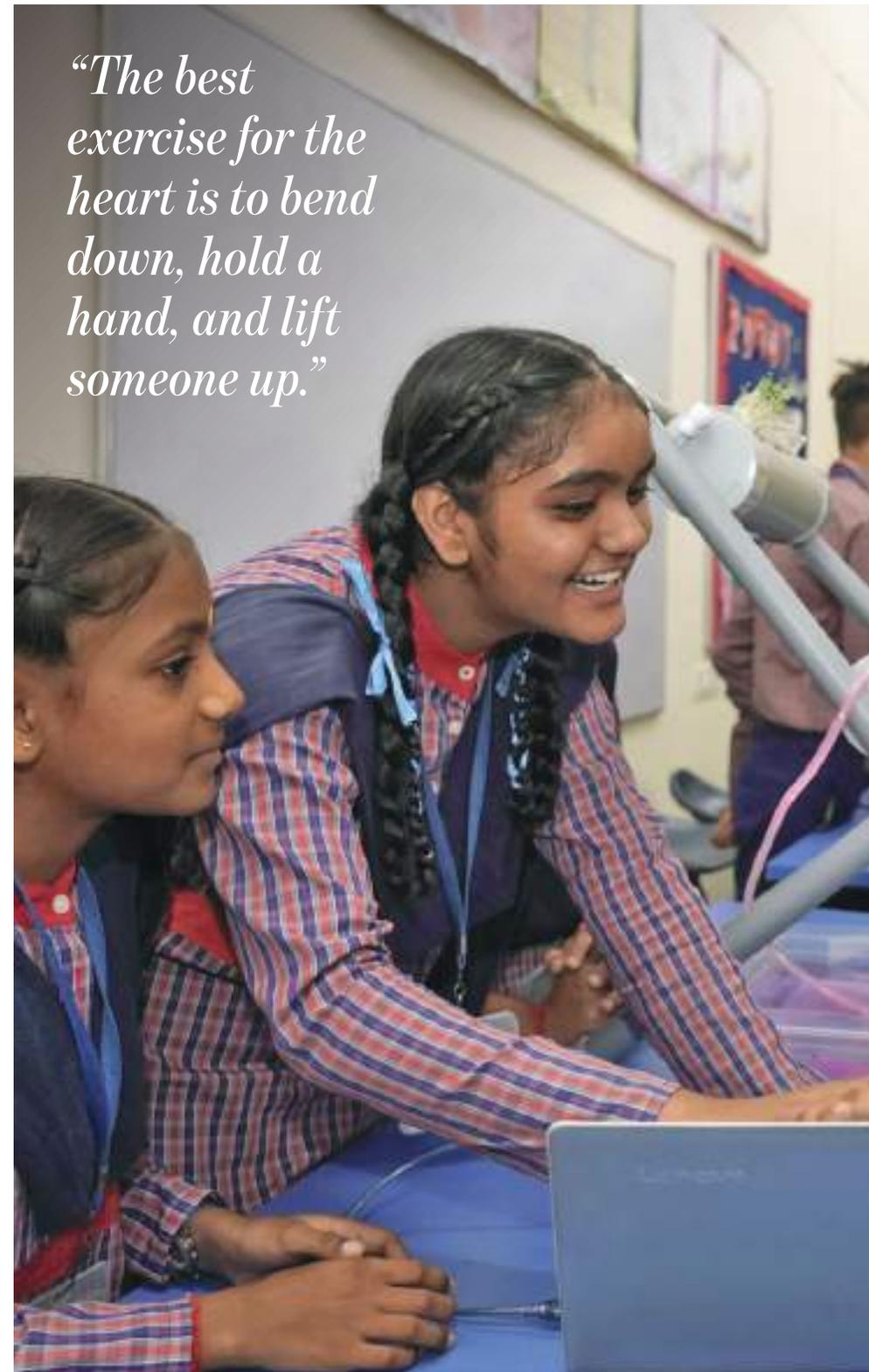
"The best exercise for the heart is to bend down, hold a hand, and lift someone up."

Continuing its commitment to empowering young individuals from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and nurturing future technology leaders, the Foundation offers the Bharti Airtel Scholarship to deserving students pursuing tech-based engineering courses at the undergraduate or integrated level in India's top 50 NIRF-ranked engineering institutes. At the same time, the Foundation's comprehensive scholarship portfolio places a special emphasis on supporting girl students, reinforcing its mission to expand inclusive access to quality education.

Advice to Fellow Givers

Mittal's counsel to new philanthropists is clear and pragmatic. Be bold, build trust, and lead with the heart. Think big, he says—India's challenges demand scale. "Boutique solutions are not enough. We need interventions that can touch millions."

He urges donors to engage with government partnerships, "Yes, it takes time. But in our mission to ensure equity in access to quality education, we have understood that the public sector's reach and the private sector's experience with implementation is a powerful combination." Equally important, he says, is building trust with NGOs. "Be transparent. Be respectful. Trust the people doing the work on the ground."

But beyond systems and strategies, Mittal returns to where it all began—with values. He shares a quote that guides his thinking: "The best exercise for the heart is to bend down, hold a hand, and lift someone up." For him, philanthropy is not about legacy or optics. It is about reaching across divides—with humility, empathy, and belief in human potential.

Through Bharti Airtel Foundation's schools, its partnerships with the government, and its commitment to innovation, Mittal is doing exactly that—lifting dreams, one child, one teacher, one system at a time. ●
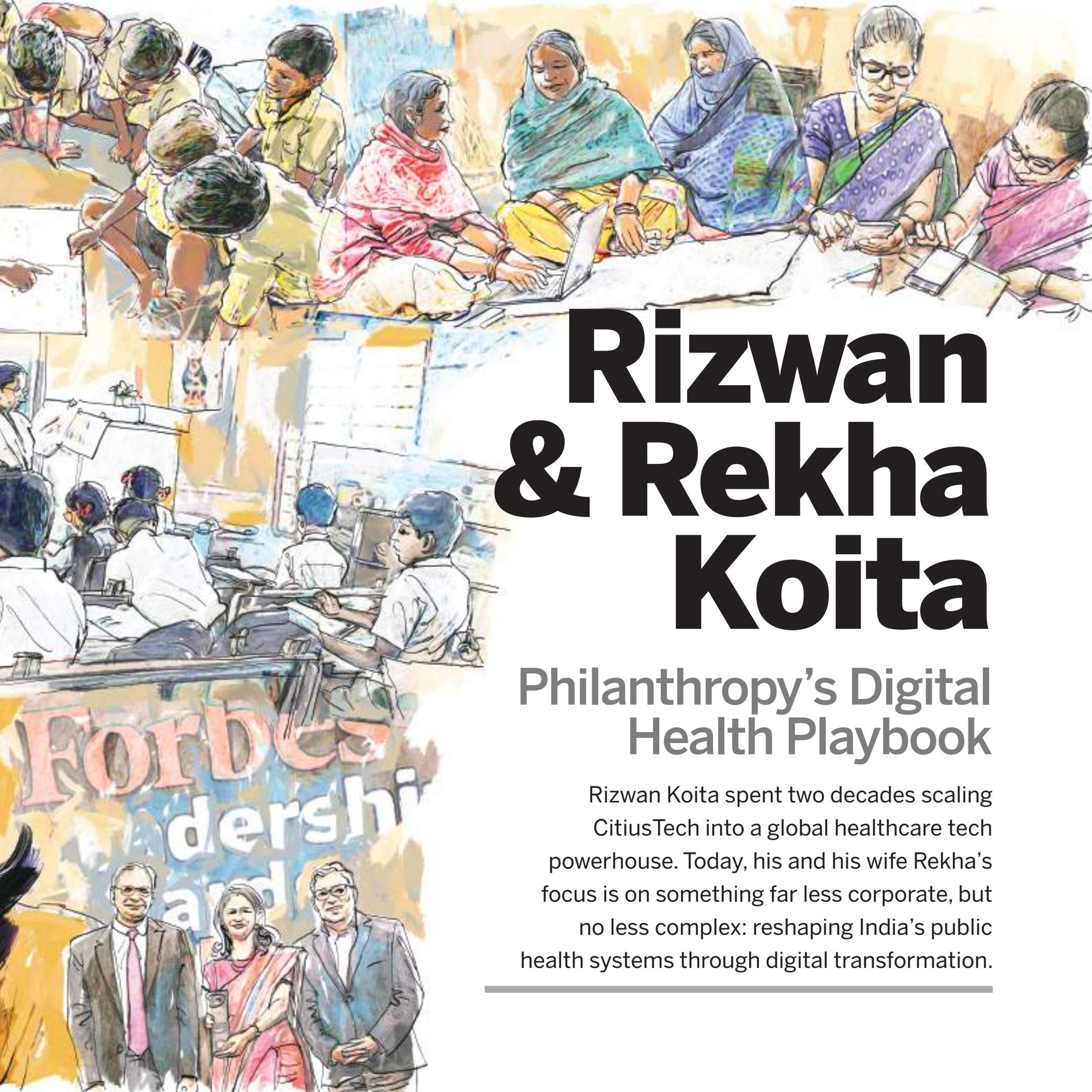
Rizwan & Rekha Koita

Philanthropy's Digital Health Playbook

Rizwan Koita spent two decades scaling CitiusTech into a global healthcare tech powerhouse. Today, his and his wife Rekha's focus is on something far less corporate, but no less complex: reshaping India's public health systems through digital transformation.

For the Koitas, philanthropy isn't about grand gestures—it's about patient engineering, precision, and partnerships that last. "We saw that many organisations were doing meaningful work, but couldn't scale," Rizwan said. "It became clear that with the right support—strategic and technical, not just financial—we could help unlock their full potential."

Going Beyond the Boardroom

In 2016, the Koitas first began immersing themselves in India's philanthropic ecosystem, meeting with key players such as Central Square Foundation, Dasra, and Bridgespan. They were not in a hurry. "We understood that to create real change, you had to learn first," they said.

When the couple launched the Koita Foundation, they wanted to use their expertise to help the social sector. They started by supporting established non-profits and government programmes that were already delivering impact but lacked the infrastructure to grow.

In 2021, when Rizwan stepped away from the day-to-day leadership of CitiusTech after helping it grow into a 9,000-strong force in healthcare IT, he took a deliberate pause. "We wanted to redirect our time and resources toward broader social impact—something intellectually challenging and rooted in purpose," he said. Rizwan set his sights on setting up institutions to transform the digital health landscape of the country. This behind-the-scenes role – of guiding digital adoption, scaling strategy, and capacity building—would soon become the foundation's hallmark.

"We wanted to redirect our time and resources toward broader social impact—something intellectually challenging and rooted in purpose."

From Organisations to Ecosystems

The Koitas' business instincts kicked in early: the real challenge wasn't funding, it was building capacity. Rekha saw immense potential in the area of NGO transformation. In its early days starting 2016, the foundation's major focus was on working closely with NGOs to redesign their internal capabilities in multiple areas, including the use of digital tools. Over time, a need was recognised to build partnerships to expand the scale of this initiative. To help catalyse this transformation in the wider ecosystem and create a multiplier, they set up the Koita Centre for Digital Transformation in partnership with India Leaders for Social Sector (ILSS). The centre focused on building the capacity of NGOs with a single-minded emphasis on organisation-wide digital transformation to use technology effectively, coupled with strategic mentorship and support.

In 2021, Rizwan decided to build another vertical focus area, using his 17 years of experience in digital health to improve the quality, accessibility, and affordability of healthcare in India. That guiding principle led to transformative partnerships: with IIT Bombay, they launched the Koita Centre for

THE MULTIPLIER EFFECT

300
Hospital
Network

65%
India's Cancer
Patients Treated

Koita's team embedded itself at Tata Memorial Hospital to develop custom-built EMRs, AI-enabled decision tools, and tele-oncology systems.

"Philanthropy isn't the end of a career—it's an evolution. Just like in tech, we're betting that when you get the architecture right, transformation follows."

Digital Health (KCDH); with the Tata Memorial Centre, they created the Koita Centre for Digital Oncology; with Ashoka University, they launched another KCDH; with RSSDI, India's largest diabetes association, they established the Koita Centre for Digital Diabetology; and with the Federation of Obstetric and Gynaecological Societies in India (FOGSI), they have recently launched the Koita Centre for Digital Maternal Care. Each centre is a large system change initiative, serving a critical function: to bridge the gap between cutting-edge research and public service delivery.
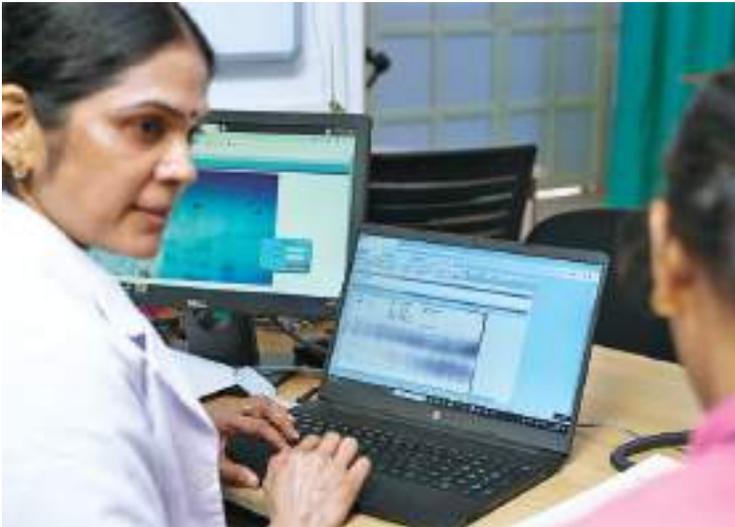
Reengineering Cancer Care

One of the Koitas' most impactful ventures has been the National Cancer Grid-Koita Centre for Digital Oncology (NCG-KCDO), an initiative to digitise cancer care across India. The statistics were stark: 1.4 million new cancer cases each year, over 850,000 deaths, and a glaring void in how care was tracked and delivered.

Working with NCG—a network of over 300 hospitals that treat 65% of India's cancer patients—the Koitas' team embedded itself at Tata Memorial Hospital to develop custom-built electronic medical records (EMRs), AI-enabled decision tools, and tele-oncology systems. "Our focus was to build new software which can be used to standardise care across the country," Rizwan said. The centre's approach weaves

together digital tools, clinical workflows, and training programmes—all with an eye on scalability and self-reliance. "Our goal is always to reduce long-term dependence on the foundation," he said. "We build internal capacity, not dependency."

Seeds That Others Can Grow

Rizwan, who once cracked problems for global clients with code and algorithms, now applies that same rigour to solving for scale in social systems. His and Rekha's advice to other aspiring philanthropists is both practical and deeply informed. First, they said, "treat technology not just as a tool, but as a strategic enabler. If used well, it can eliminate inefficiencies and democratise access—but only if applied at scale".

Second, don't do it alone. "To create large-scale change, you must engage with government and public institutions. Circumventing them limits your reach. Collaborating with them multiplies it." Third, bring the same discipline to philanthropy that you would to building a company. "It's not just about giving money. It's about investing your time, networks, and expertise to build long-term systems."

For the Koitas, philanthropy isn't the end of a career—it's an evolution. Just like in tech, they're betting that when you get the architecture right, transformation follows. ●

Sunil Wadhwani

A WISH to Serve

Born in Delhi and trained as an engineer, Sunil Tekchand Wadhwani has always had one foot in logic and the other in empathy. A trailblazer of the IT industry and a sharp investor, Wadhwani has quietly transformed into a powerhouse philanthropist, building a new future for millions through data, diagnostics, and deliberate innovation.

Today, the institutions he has founded or funded—from AI think tanks to rural health clinics—serve as lifelines for India's most underserved communities. But the seeds of his giving were sown much earlier, on the lanes near his childhood home. "When you grow up in a country like India, you learn how the circumstances of your birth dictate so much of your life story," Wadhwani said in a 2021 interview with Pittsburgh Quarterly. "I wanted to find a way to channel these two personal passions—innovation and healthcare—in a way that would help underserved families in India and other developing countries."

That spark became a lifelong pursuit. After conquering the American tech industry, he set out on his philanthropic mission.

Engineering Systemic Change

"Education and healthcare are the two fundamental building blocks in any country for development," he said. "And even in the mid to late 1990s, it seemed to me that there were a lot of interesting things going on in education so I decided to focus on healthcare."

Wadhwani was among the few philanthropists willing to support organisations not just for their programmes, but for strengthening internal capacity. However, he observed a recurring challenge: despite years of support, very few NGOs were able to scale meaningfully, even though scale had been a priority for him from the start.

At the same time, working closely with these organisations took him to remote parts of India, where he saw firsthand the complexity of the challenges on the ground.

About a decade ago, his experiences led him to start his own initiative in India. He initially focused on developing point solutions

"When you grow up in a country like India, you learn how the circumstances of your birth dictate so much of your life story."

with leading health entrepreneurs. "Eventually we realised," he says, "it's very tough to integrate them into government systems and workflows, because when you want to do things at scale, you have to operate with the government."

Eventually, in 2000, he launched the Wadhwani Impact Trust (WIT) to bring structure and scale to his giving. Unlike traditional philanthropic models, Wadhwani's approach was systemic and impact-driven.

Through WIT, Wadhwani created and funded organisations which built solutions that could be deployed through government systems. One of his flagship initiatives was the Wadhwani Institute for Artificial Intelligence (Wadhwani AI), a global hub dedicated to developing AI tools for public health, education, skilling, job creation, and infrastructure.

THE MULTIPLIER EFFECT

30+ Partnerships with Government and Nonprofits

25 AI Solutions for Social Impact Deployed or Piloted in **10+ States**

100+ Million People impacted through public health and AI initiatives

Another was Wadhwani Institute for Sustainable Healthcare (WISH Foundation), which began by deploying a direct-service model to deliver primary healthcare to rural India. Over time, the model matured into a government-partnered effort that used AI tools to make existing public health systems faster and smarter.

Government as Partner, Not Obstacle

Wadhwani's clinics—now called Digital Health and Wellness Centers (dHWCs)—have treated over 21 million patients across more than 1,000 facilities. They cover a population of 140 million and are embedded within state-run healthcare systems.

He learned that working with the government required humility, deep knowledge of public sector workflows, and relationship-building at multiple levels. "Learning number one was to start tackling things at a system level, not at this individual point solution level," Wadhwani said. "The government is absolutely key."

The Wadhwani model now integrates across three layers: policy influence, creation of AI public goods, and real-world implementation in states. His focus on scale is deliberate. "This is perhaps the most challenging part of the equation," he said. "There are thousands of

"I've always believed that compassion and innovation can go hand-in-hand."

non-profits doing really neat stuff at a relatively small scale and very few are able to scale up. The thinking in the social sector, again, because of limitations imposed by donors, tends to be incremental."

Strategy with a Heart

What sets Wadhwani's philanthropy apart is the way it brings together head and heart—deep empathy guided by rigorous thinking. His years living in Delhi shaped his sense of why the work matters; his training at IIT and Carnegie Mellon shaped how he approaches it."I've always believed that compassion and innovation can go hand-in-hand," he said. "The question is not just how to do good—but how to do good that lasts, at scale." From eighty-foot offices to 140 million lives touched, Wadhwani's journey reflects a rare truth in development: it's not just money that changes the world—it's method. ●

Swathi Kantamani

Trading Perfect for Possible

Visakhapatnam-born Swathi Kantamani once edited children's books and walked the halls of Oxford University. Her journey in philanthropy began with weekends spent volunteering and a gnawing awareness of the contrast between her world and the one she encountered in rural Telangana. What unfolded was a trajectory of learning and unlearning – a path that guides her approach to philanthropy today.

T he more you go to the villages, the more you realise that they are not very different from you," she says. "You are not a benefactor. They are not indebted to you." This clarity has come with time and seeing visible transformation firsthand. From private school interventions to supporting state-wide reform in foundational learning, Kantamani has become one of the most thoughtful voices in India's new generation of systemic philanthropists. Her story is one of deep personal evolution—of letting go, listening closely, and learning to think big by first stepping back.

Beginnings in Direct Service

Her earliest acts of giving were shaped by instinct and circumstance. Returning from the UK in the mid-2000s, she began volunteering with NATCO Trust, an organisation set up by her family. It started with direct work—running schools, distributing resources, responding to visible needs. But behind the well-meaning efforts was a growing discomfort.

There was a sense of imbalance between the giver and the receiver, and a model that created parallel systems rather than enabling public ones. Over the years, the language of charity gave way to a language of justice, equity, and shared dignity. "That distance—between 'us' and 'them'—started to dissolve," she says. "I realised I was not here to act on someone's behalf. I was here to be guided by them."

The Journey to Scale

Kantamani spent years building what she calls "beautiful pro-grammes"—high-touch, deeply controlled, and painstakingly designed. Her team managed every detail, held themselves to

near-impossible standards, and delivered excellence. But eventually, she began to ask a different kind of question: How many people are we really reaching?

"I'm acutely aware that small numbers and perfection may be my undoing," she says. "I can achieve high standards with small groups. But real satisfaction now comes from asking how much of the system we are changing."

That reflection sparked a quiet but important shift. Instead of running everything herself, she began supporting Systemic Support Organisations (SSOs)—a cadre of nonprofits which work as the missing middle linking policymakers and grassroots nonprofits. It was not an easy transition. It meant handing over control and embracing messier pathways to bigger change.

THE MULTIPLIER EFFECT

Central Square Foundation (CSF)

11 Lakh Students
in Telangana have received
Teaching-Learning Materials

45,207
Teachers have been trained
as of February 2025

But it also meant scaling impact far beyond what she could do alone. "I learned to trade perfect for possible," she says. "And possible, at scale, is powerful."

State-Level Bet on Foundational Literacy

One of her most ambitious efforts has been in the state of Telangana, where Kantamani teamed up with Central Square Foundation (CSF) to embed Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) into state priorities.

She didn't jump in immediately. It took months of observing classrooms, shadowing CSF teams, and speaking with leadership before she decided to fund the work. Starting at the district level, her support gradually expanded to a full state partnership—aligned with the national NIPUN Bharat Mission.

Her role was not just financial. Kantamani joined state advisory committees, engaged with senior bureaucrats and elected leaders, and consistently urged CSF to stretch its scope to include Early Childhood Education (ECE). The result was not just a grant, but a shared agenda for system-wide reform.

"It's not enough to cut a cheque," she says. "You have to lend your voice, your presence, and your influence to the work. That's what shifts the system."

"Your money means little without the right partners. Build strong teams. Stay close to the field. Listen before acting."

Advice to Next Gen Givers

For those considering philanthropy, Kantamani has four key pieces of advice. First: aim for ambition, not control. Don't waste time perfecting boutique models that serve dozens when the need is for millions. Second: let go of the need for visibility. That means being willing to learn and staying in the background when needed.

Third: back people, not just plans. "Your money means little without the right partners. Build strong teams. Stay close to the field. Listen before acting."

And finally: take the leap. "Don't wait until everything is risk-proof," she says. "If you believe something could work, even if it's ₹50 lakh or a crore, there's merit in plunging in. Trust your instinct. Stay in the game."

Kantamani's journey—marked by reflection, reinvention, and reach—offers a powerful model for what philanthropy can look like when it is built not on legacy or visibility, but on courage, collaboration, and shared purpose. ●

Tanvi Bikhchandani

Turning Philanthropy into a Force Multiplier

From co-founding Ashoka University to battling air pollution, Sanjeev and Surabhi Bikhchandani's family blends personal commitment with systemic change to tackle India's toughest challenges. For the Bikhchandani family, philanthropy is more than an obligation—it's a personal legacy passed from one generation to the next.

When Info Edge co-founder Sanjeev Bikhchandani took his company public, he and his wife Surabhi began channelling resources back to the institutions that shaped them. That early commitment led to one of their most ambitious undertakings: co-founding Ashoka University, envisioned as a model for strengthening Indian higher education and contributing to nation-building.

"Beyond financial contributions, we were actively involved in mobilising resources, bringing together stakeholders, and shaping the university's vision and strategy," says their daughter Tanvi. "Other than financial support, our family supports the portfolio on issues such as strategy and fundraising."

This ethos of active engagement—where giving is paired with hands-on participation—has since become the family's hallmark. Tanvi and her brother Raghav inherited not just their parents' generosity, but also an understanding of their privilege and a belief that philanthropy should aim for structural transformation rather than temporary relief.

From Grants to Force Multipliers

While the family's earliest philanthropic steps were guided by instinct, offering ad hoc support to organisations that approached them, experience reshaped their approach. They began asking a harder question: how could their giving address root causes rather than symptoms?

The answer came in the form of what they now call "force multipliers"—high-leverage interventions designed for disproportionate and sustained impact. For instance, in the school education sector, the shift meant moving away from funding single schools toward scalable tools and

"Beyond financial contributions, we were actively involved in mobilising resources, bringing together stakeholders, and shaping the university's vision and strategy."
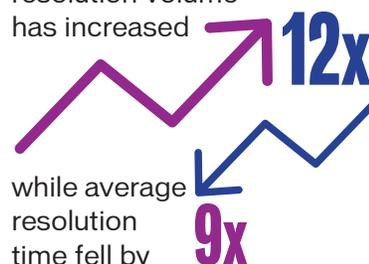
THE MULTIPLIER EFFECT

A-PAG's **Dispersed Sources Program** started in Delhi and has now expanded to

13 Cities
5,00,000

pollution hotspot issues identified and resolved.

Over the past 4 years (2021-2025), the resolution volume has increased **12x**

while average resolution time fell by **9x**

technologies that could transform teaching and learning across thousands. Equally important, they focused on organisations willing to work directly with government—either to drive policy reform or to integrate proven programmes into public systems. It marked a decisive move from reactive donations to proactive, targeted investments aimed at systemic change.

Strengthening Systems from Within

Ashoka University may remain their flagship institution-building project, but the Bikhchandanis' work with the Air Pollution Action Group (A-PAG) shows how their strategy translates into practice. Having lived in New Delhi, they had experienced first-hand the health toll of air pollution—an issue that disproportionately affects the most marginalised communities.

Rather than creating parallel solutions, A-PAG embeds technical experts and data systems inside government departments to boost execution capacity. One standout effort, the Dispersed Sources Programme, targets overlooked pollution sources such as illegal construction debris, garbage burning, and road dust. The results have been exceptional. In 13 cities across New Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar, more than 600,000 issues have been flagged and roughly

"A-PAG embeds technical experts and data systems inside government departments to boost execution capacity."

504,000 resolved. An independent evaluation by IIT Delhi found over 15% reduction in pollution in pilot areas, with significant drops in PM2.5 concentrations. The programme's success has spurred expansion beyond New Delhi, with the Bikhchandanis providing both funding and strategic guidance as a part of A-PAG's advisory council.

Advice for Fellow Changemakers

Tanvi offers a distilled playbook for anyone seeking large-scale impact. Start small, but start: "Don't be intimidated by the scale of the problem. Taking the first step, no matter how small, is essential and often inspires others to join."

Target high-leverage opportunities. Direct resources toward underfunded, high-potential interventions—especially those needing flexible, risk-tolerant capital that government and corporate social responsibility budgets can't provide.

Collaborate relentlessly. "No one can solve complex challenges alone. Pooling capital, sharing knowledge, and co-funding initiatives are crucial for unlocking scale and avoiding duplication," Tanvi says.

For the Bikhchandanis, philanthropy is less about writing cheques and more about changing the systems that shape millions of lives—a force multiplier for a better India. ●
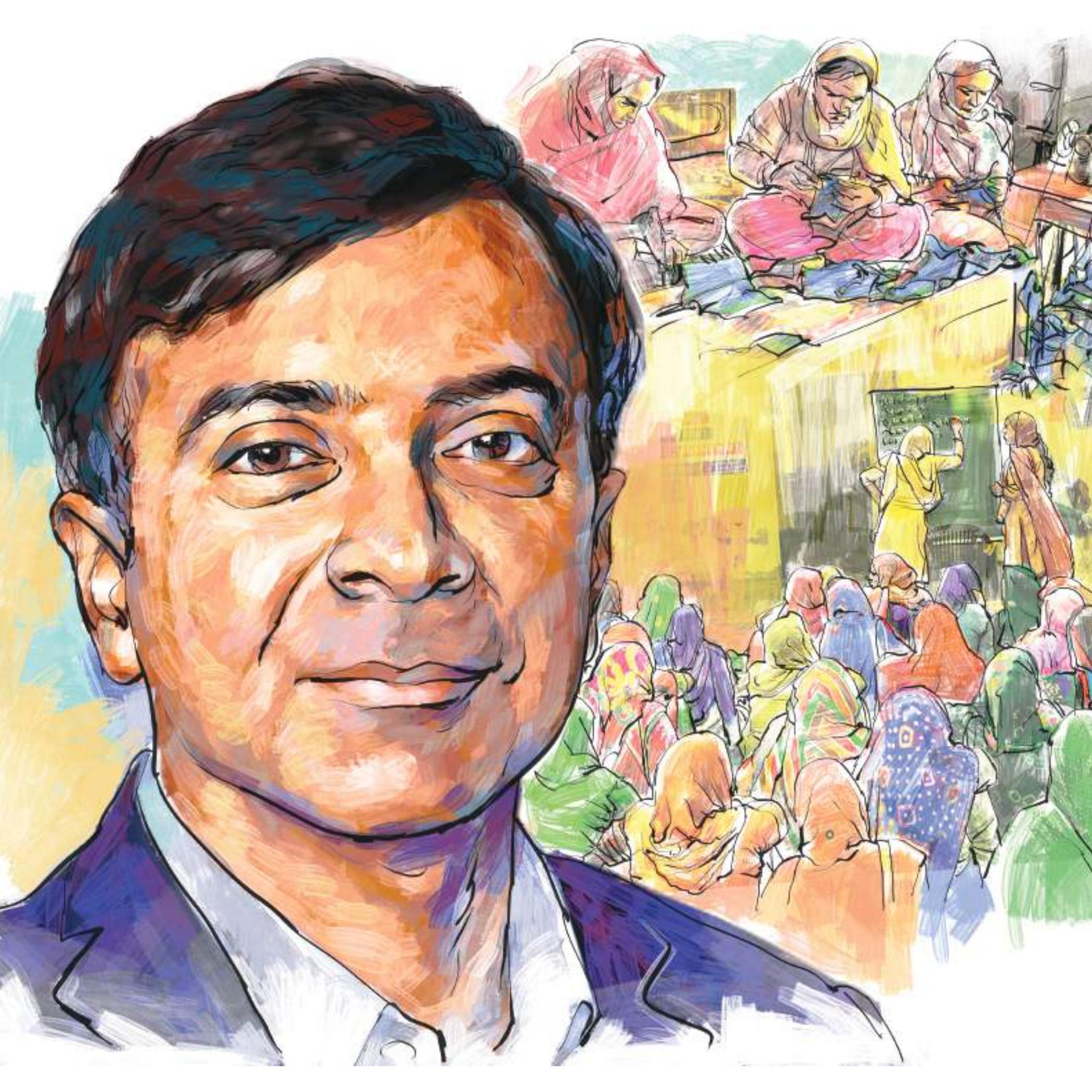
Vikrant Bhargava

Scaling with Evidence

Vikrant Bhargava, former co-founder of PartyGaming Plc. and now Managing Partner at Veddis, is a man who built a global business empire—and then quietly turned his attention to fixing systems that can create meaningful change. His story isn't one of overnight epiphany. It's a journey shaped by observation, data, and a lifelong belief in giving back.

G rowing up in a modest household in India, Bhargava watched his father help others, even when resources were tight. That early exposure to empathy planted a seed. "I always knew I wanted to give back in some way," he reflects. "But I also knew I wanted to first go out into the world, learn, earn, and understand how systems worked."

With degrees from IIT Delhi and IIM Calcutta, he set out on a corporate path, building PartyGaming into one of the largest online gaming companies in the world. It wasn't until his late 30s—after a successful business exit—that he consciously pivoted to philanthropy. Today, he spends 40-50% of his time on philanthropy with the foundation.

His early philanthropic years were exploratory. Bhargava launched LetzDream Foundation and LetzChange—one a grassroots-focused charity, the other a tech platform for giving that now powers Give India. Sector-agnostic and curious, he supported a wide range of causes, driven more by empathy than outcomes.

But Bhargava was also a data-driven investor, and soon, questions emerged. What was the real impact? What could be scaled? What offered leverage?

Partnering with Governments for Impact

Answers came serendipitously in 2013, when a livelihoods project he backed in rural Rajasthan caught the attention of the state's chief secretary. A cold-call meeting turned into a collaborative partnership.

With government buy-in and professional implementation support, the project delivered a fourfold increase in income for participating

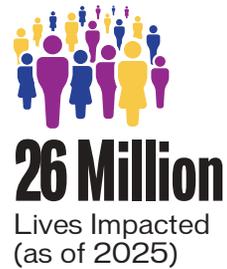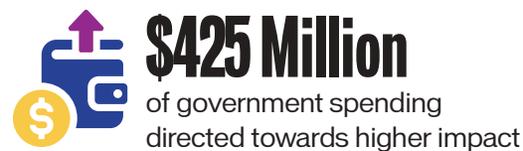*"That's when it hit me—if you want to scale impact, you have to work with the system, not around it."*

families. It was a turning point. "The return on investment was so clear," Bhargava says. "That's when it hit me—if you want to scale impact, you have to work with the system, not around it."

It wasn't an obvious path. Bhargava had long been wary of working with the government. "If 10-12 years ago, I'd been asked to list 25 potential things we'd be doing, working with the government clearly would not have been one of those," he admits.

But openness to new ideas—and meeting the right people at the right time—changed his trajectory. By 2018, that openness had evolved into a strategy: support organisations that partner deeply with the government, deploy high-quality talent, and embed data-driven solutions within public systems.

THE MULTIPLIER EFFECT

$1 **$3** **$40**

For every $1 invested into ASPIRE, partner organisations are able to raise $3, and $40 of government spend is evidence-backed.

$425 Million
of government spending directed towards higher impact

26 Million
Lives Impacted
(as of 2025)

08 State Partnerships

01 Central Partnership

Fixing Systems, Not Just Symptoms

A marquee example of this strategy is ASPIRE, a platform he helped seed within J-PAL South Asia. Known for rigorous academic research and randomised evaluations, J-PAL was nudged by Bhargava to expand their work.

ASPIRE became its bridge to real-world implementation—scaling proven interventions through partnerships with governments across South Asia. "ASPIRE extends J-PAL's work, so the focus is not just on generating evidence, but about taking that evidence to policymakers and operationalising it at scale," Bhargava says.

This approach reflects his broader philanthropic ethos: think like a systems engineer, not a saviour. "Philanthropy isn't about having all the answers before you start," he says. "It's about constantly refining your approach based on data and real-world impact." He is sceptical about the impact of emotionally compelling but small-scale projects

"You have to find the committed bureaucrats already trying to solve these problems and support them— with talent, data, tools, and time."

alone. "If you want to create real change, don't aim to build the best school. Fix the education system."

Advice for Sustainable, Scalable Change

Working with governments isn't easy, he acknowledges. It requires more than money—it demands humility, patience, and intellectual honesty. "You can't walk in thinking you know better," he says. "You have to find the committed bureaucrats already trying to solve these problems and support them—with talent, data, tools, and time."

Bhargava's brand of philanthropy is quietly reshaping how impact is conceived and delivered. His core advice is deceptively simple: If you care about sustainable, scalable change, you cannot afford to ignore the government.

For Bhargava, the real win isn't building something from scratch— it's helping the system work better for everyone. ●

Pathways to
Systemic Philanthropy

They came from different worlds, backed different causes and followed deeply personal motivations. Yet, as their journeys unfolded, a set of shared pathways emerged. When approached with intent, systemic work becomes a powerful lever – one that allows philanthropists to engage deeply with an issue, address its root causes, and create impact that multiplies over time.

Over time, each of these philanthropists recognised that isolated interventions alone were insufficient to create the kind of large-scale, enduring impact that they wanted to leave behind. This realisation led them to evolve their giving strategies – from funding standalone projects to adopting a systemic approach and treating their investments as innovation capital. They discovered that this approach generated a multiplier effect, delivering a far higher impact and social return on investment than direct interventions could have.

Across our conversations with these 11 remarkable philanthropists, four pathways to systemic impact stand out—leveraging the government, having a deep thematic focus, investing in teams, and a collaborative approach.

Create a Multiplier Effect by Leveraging the Government

Nearly every philanthropist we profiled experienced a defining moment where they realised the transformative scale they could achieve by working with the government. For instance, Vikrant Bhargava recalls a pivotal meeting with a government official in Rajasthan, which changed his perspective on working with the government. What began as a fortuitous interaction eventually reshaped his giving strategy, as he recognised that collaborating with the government offered the highest return on investment.

By aligning with government policies and programmes, philanthropists can create a powerful multiplier effect by unlocking public spending. Ajay Piramal often notes that for every ₹1 his

foundation invests, the government invests ₹10-15 to take initiatives to scale. The result is non-linear impact—growth that no parallel delivery system could achieve.

Others followed a similar arc. Rakesh Mittal, for example, built on learnings from the Bharti Airtel Foundation's flagship programme, Satya Bharti Schools, which was launched in 2006 to provide free, quality education to rural India. Building on this experience, the Bharti Foundation developed the Quality Support Program, launched in 2013, as a partnership model with state governments to achieve greater scale and reach.

Crucially, these philanthropists learned to approach government with empathy, not frustration and eventually came to understand that there are enough talented and committed officers to make change happen. Sunil Wadhwani speaks of identifying champions within the bureaucracy and building trust across levels—not just at the top. This also enables his team to gain a deeper understanding of government priorities and tailor their solutions to fit within their systems and workflows

As Bhargava puts it, creating impact at scale is also about ensuring a long-term effect in the system, which, once fixed, no longer requires the involvement of a philanthropist.

Engage Deeply in Core Thematic Areas

The profiled philanthropists chose specific issue areas intentionally to maximise their impact, rather than spreading their efforts thin. Rizwan and Rekha Koita chose healthcare and digital initiatives—areas aligned with both personal conviction and professional expertise. Others made similarly deliberate choices, enabling them to engage in deep problem-solving by understanding the root causes of the issue.

Avi Nash channelled his giving into supporting high-potential students from underprivileged backgrounds, backing Central Square Foundation's High Potential Students programme, which aims to reshape the learning journeys of 100,000 young people by equipping them with the skills needed to thrive in higher education and high-growth careers.

"The result is non-linear impact— growth that no parallel delivery system could achieve."

For many, engagement went far beyond writing cheques. Mirik Gogri immersed himself in the climate space, completing 30-40 online courses. Swathi Kantamani paired her funding for CSF with hard-won insights from her work in early childhood education in Telangana. Bhargava plays a key advisory role at ASPIRE, continually pushing the team to iterate on and strengthen their approach. Tanvi Bikhchandani and her family play a similar role at A-PAG.

Depth also brought patience. These philanthropists offered long-term, unrestricted funding, accepting that systems shaped over centuries cannot be repaired in months. Since evidence of systemic change can take years to manifest, Amit Chandra views setbacks not as full stops but as commas – opportunities to pivot and refine the approach.

"Behind each philanthropist stands a professional management team with multi-dimensional expertise backing their efforts."

Build Strong Teams and Capabilities

Systemic change demands professional capacity. Behind each philanthropist stands a professional management team with multi-dimensional expertise backing their efforts. This includes understanding development challenges from technical, political, social, and economic perspectives, as well as a strong expertise in navigating relationships with government bureaucrats.

At the Piramal Foundation, CEO Aditya Natraj brings a wealth of experience to his role, drawing on his knowledge from both the development and private sectors. The team at Piramal Foundation thrives under his and Ajay Piramal's leadership, combining their thematic knowledge with the rigour and discipline of business. Veddis Foundation followed a similar path, investing in hiring talented leaders who can build a robust giving strategy.

The Wadhwani Foundation runs on discipline: quarterly plans, state-wise targets, monthly dashboard reviews, and longer-term outcome frameworks. Others rely on trusted advisors. Avi Nash credits his counsel with helping him identify high-potential bets and suggest best practices on effective philanthropy.

"Partnerships with social sector organisations, fellow funders and ecosystem actors repeatedly surfaced as essential to population-level impact."

Use Collective Action as a Force Multiplier

None of these philanthropists works alone. Partnerships with social sector organisations, fellow funders and ecosystem actors repeatedly surfaced as essential to population-level impact.

Swathi Kantamani and Ajit Isaac back SSOs such as Central Square Foundation and Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy with patient capital for the long term to create non-linear impact.

Coordinated approaches, such as pooling capital, sharing due diligence, and adopting co-funding models, can also accelerate scale and avoid duplication of efforts. For instance, Ajit Isaac supports the Economic Growth Collaborative (EGC), which brings together philanthropists, organisations and domain experts anchored by a shared, long-term economic vision to increase India's GDP per capita by 2047. The EGC serves as a platform for sharing resources, aligning priorities, and coordinating action across organisations.

Collaborating with technical partners also strengthens problem-solving. Amit Chandra recommends joining collaboratives in your areas of interest, not just to combine the muscle of different members, but to benefit from the healthy push and pull of diverse perspectives.

The Road Ahead

The exemplary philanthropists highlighted in this report—whose initiatives span public health, climate action, education, rural livelihoods, skill development, and more—demonstrate how strategic philanthropy, particularly when aligned with government priorities, can unlock systemic change. These remarkable individuals have moved beyond traditional giving and acted as catalysts by deploying risk and innovation capital to actively strengthen public systems.

Their stories offer a blueprint for a more durable model of social investment, one built on partnership, patience and scale. As India continues its trajectory toward economic prosperity, the role of philanthropy in addressing persistent social development gaps becomes increasingly crucial.

The insights from this book serve as a powerful invitation for all philanthropists to reimagine their giving strategies and adopt a more systemic approach. When philanthropy shifts from funding projects to fixing systems, its impact multiplies—and lasts.

"When philanthropy shifts from funding projects to fixing systems, its impact multiplies—and lasts."

Philanthropists Can

- **Adopt a portfolio approach**: Balance programmatic giving with systemic bets. Many have begun their journey with around 10-20% allocated to systemic efforts, which can grow to 50% or beyond over time.
- **Focus on 1-2 thematic areas**: Concentrate your efforts on deeply understanding and solving problems in a few issue areas.
- **Chase the multiplier**: Leverage government schemes and programmes to unlock non-linear impact.
- **Back strong teams:** Invest in people with diverse skills who can manage complexity and steward long-term change.
- **Collaborate intentionally**: Actively seek and foster partnerships with other 'systemically' inclined funders, thought partners, SSOs, and government changemakers. ●

Piramal
Rizwan Am
Wadhwani Gogri Mittal A
Ajay Bhargava Piramals
Rakesh Archana Ajit Kan
Vikrant Amit Mittal
Sunil Kantamani Bikhch
Chandra Rizwan
Koita Swathi Tanvi Wa
Isaac Avi Koita Bh
Rekha Cha
Bikhchandani Bharti
Rizwan Amit
Mirik
Tanvi Mittal Isaac Mittal
Piramal Bhargava PiramalSw
Rakesh Chandra Koita Kanta
Rizwan Amit Isa
Vikrant Swathi
Archana Ajit
Wadhwani Sunil Rekha
Avi Kantamani Ajay Bikhcha
Bharti Nash Tanvi Wad
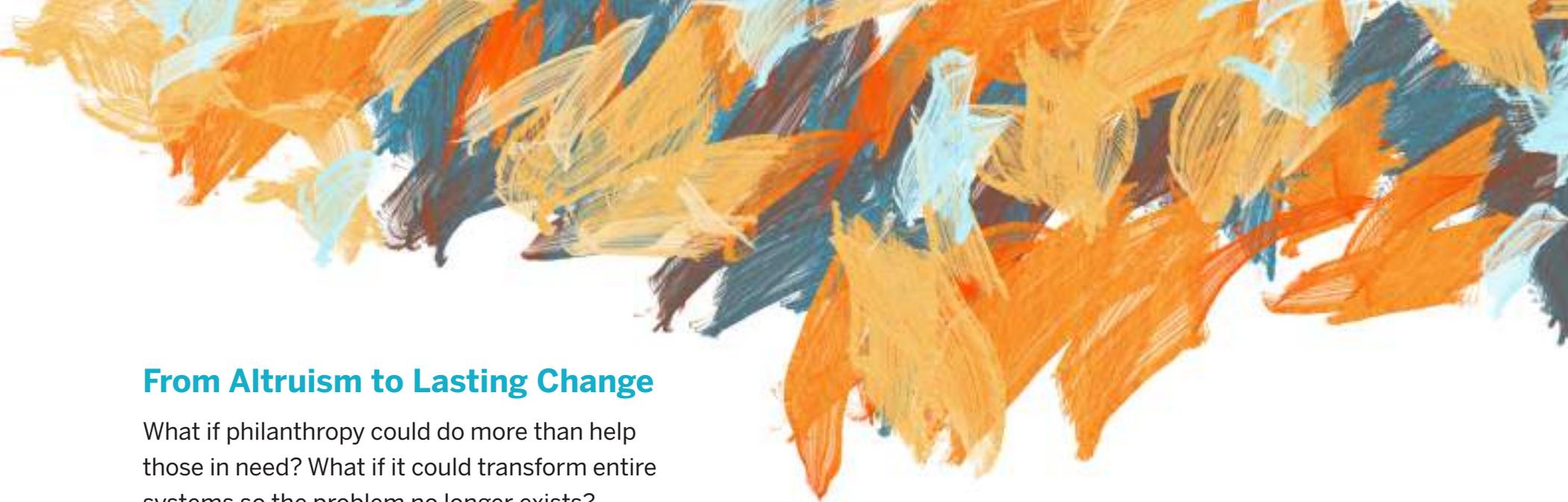
From Altruism to Lasting Change

What if philanthropy could do more than help those in need? What if it could transform entire systems so the problem no longer exists?

This book shares the journeys of eleven philanthropists who each faced a turning point that pushed them to think bigger: *What if my resources could help reshape the system itself?* By daring to think bigger and partnering with governments, they discovered how their contribution can ripple outward, multiplying impact and reaching millions.

Honest, reflective, and deeply human, these journeys offer inspiration and practical insight for philanthropists seeking to create large-scale impact. Together, they offer a compelling vision of how philanthropy can create impact that multiplies, and lasts.