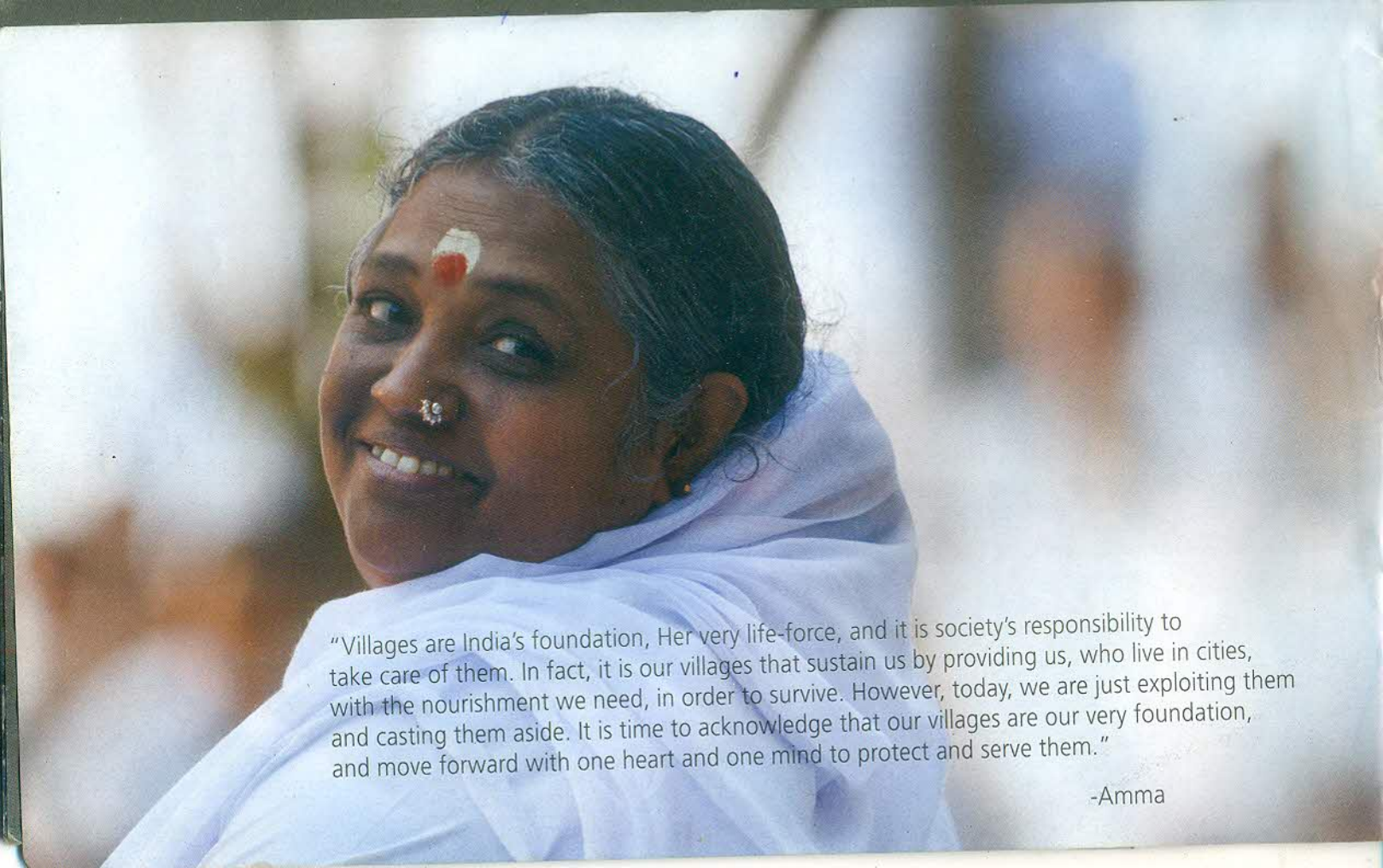




TRANSFORMING  
RURAL  
INDIA

AMRITA  
**Serve**  
AMRITA SELF RELIANT VILLAGES



"Villages are India's foundation, Her very life-force, and it is society's responsibility to take care of them. In fact, it is our villages that sustain us by providing us, who live in cities, with the nourishment we need, in order to survive. However, today, we are just exploiting them and casting them aside. It is time to acknowledge that our villages are our very foundation, and move forward with one heart and one mind to protect and serve them."

-Amma

## Amrita **Self-Reliant** Villages

Until the 18th century, India was one of the world's wealthiest nations. Indian villagers lived their lives in harmony with nature and based on traditional values. They were skilled makers of silk and other fine cloth, medicinal drugs and pottery, and were prosperous owners of sandalwood, gold, silver, emeralds and diamonds. One can see a glimpse of India's affluence from the Arabian ambassador Razzak's description of the glory of the Vijaynagar Empire: "... such as the eye has not seen, nor has the ear heard of, any place to equal it on earth."

Today, however, Indian villages tell a different tale. Travelling across the length and breadth of India during her annual tours, and stopping in remote areas en route from one city to another, Amma has personally seen and heard the problems of thousands of poor villagers all over the country. Amma's 60th birthday was celebrated with the launch of a new humanitarian project, Amrita SeRVe, wherein the Mata Amritanandamayi Math (MAM) is working in 101 villages throughout India with a view to helping them become self-reliant.

In fact, all of MAM's humanitarian activities — whether building homes for the homeless or distributing pensions to destitute widows — have been the direct outcome of stories of suffering Amma has heard from those who have come to her. This new project is yet another expression of Amma's boundless love and compassion for suffering humanity. It draws upon the experience of various humanitarian activities that MAM has been engaged in throughout the world for the past three decades.



**Project Vision** To empower villagers to live in a prosperous village—where people are educated and healthy, and lead a life of dignity in a clean and pollution-free environment; where everyone's basic needs of life such as food, water, clothing, housing and employment are met; where there is harmony between man and nature; and where there is a self-reliant and vibrant culture rooted in India's age-old traditional wisdom.

Model for

## Sustainable Development

There is no rigid blueprint of the interventions planned. These are being designed in close consultation with local communities in order to best address their specific priorities. The Amrita SeRve project is strongly characterized by the process of 'learning by doing' that is attuned to the ground realities.

Certain activities and guiding principles characterize the project:

- Formation and strengthening of SRGs (Self-Reliant Groups)
- Respecting and restoring harmony between human beings and nature
- Strengthening of traditional values and respecting local knowledge
- Leveraging existing infrastructure and utilizing government schemes
- MAM's role as mentor and facilitator

**SRGs** Self-Reliant Groups, a key component of the project, are made up of 9 to 11 people (women, men or youth), and they work towards fulfilling the project vision. Women SRGs especially play a key role because a woman, as wife and mother, is integral to strengthening the whole family.

**Respecting and restoring harmony between human beings and nature** The loss of harmony between human beings and nature is leading to increased natural disasters. At the village level, this manifests in the large-scale use of chemicals in farming, the cutting down of trees, resultant loss in biodiversity, and unsanitary conditions.

**Strengthening of traditional values and respecting local knowledge** Most problems facing human society today result from a decline in values such as helping and serving others, using things according to need and not greed and respecting others, especially women. There is a lot of wisdom in traditional agricultural practices, water management methods, and healing practices and the need is to document, revive and strengthen these.



## Leveraging existing infrastructure and utilizing government schemes

The existing infrastructure in villages such as schools, anganwadis, and health centers will be strengthened. There will be coordination with other voluntary organizations for specific tasks. Wherever possible, villagers will be encouraged to utilize government schemes for health insurance, maternity benefits, old age pensions, etc.



**MAM's role as mentor and facilitator** MAM will seek to empower villagers so that they fully utilize the physical and human resources available to them. Critical to the success of Amrita SeRve is the tenet that village communities must become the driving force of their own development. Villagers will be expected to contribute a substantial amount of their time, skills and resources towards the project. The focus will be on building local technical, administrative and entrepreneurial capacity. MAM's role will be that of a mentor and facilitator, until the transition to full local ownership.

Activities have begun in the following seven focus areas:

Health | Education | Water and Sanitation | Agriculture

Eco-Friendly Infrastructure | Income Generation | Self-Empowerment



