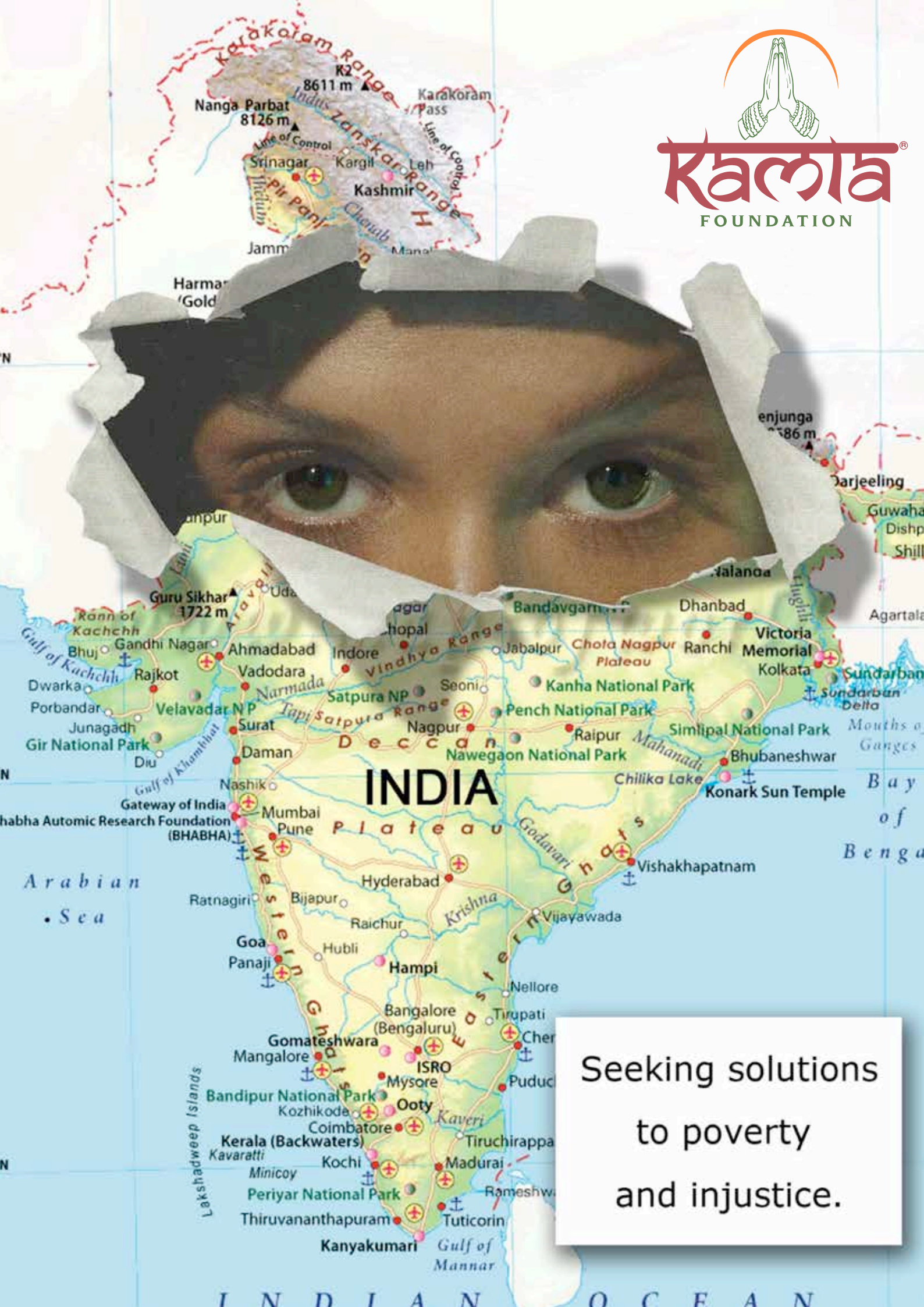




Kalma[®]
FOUNDATION



Seeking solutions
to poverty
and injustice.

belief
Orphans
Globalisation
belief
low-caste
advice
Donate
tribal people
Ford Trust
cycle of dependency
Self sufficiency
barriers deprivation
micro credit
Donate
Daan
beneficiaries
Volunteering
beneficiaries
distressed
Dalits ('downtrodden')
Providing hope
impact
Women
India violated culture
caste hierarchy
donate
Mission
Prejudice
Daan
Persecuted
skills & training
Micro enterprises
Kamla Foundation
independence
Changing Minds - Changing Lives
stigmatised
marginalised
invisible
asset less
human rights
social inclusion
inspirational
domestic violence
Personal freedom
Empowerment
Marginalisation
Rural invisible
Values culture
Widows
philanthropic
Sustainability
skills & training
micro credit
Oppressed violated
illiteracy
Understanding
Untouchables
Victimised
communities
tradition
Partnership Working
Poverty
bonded labour
Water Management
Livelihoods
lasting legacy
Alienation
donate
Exploitation
Self sufficiency
Fund Raising
Low Caste
beneficiaries Culture
Barriers
beneficiaries
Innovate
Influence

Our understanding of poverty

"The earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not every man's greed"

Mahatma Gandhi

Just imagine if you've never been to school.....

How would you feel? You are not able to write your name, read simple words, or count money. You have low self-esteem. You are open to being exploited, cheated and abused. You don't understand official documents but have to endorse them anyway. You use a thumb print and feel humiliated.

Moreover, if you're a woman, your opinion is not important. The word of your 8 year old son may carry more weight. You fear the police and public officials, and have little or no understanding of your basic rights, including your rights over your children, your property, your inheritance and your body.

The above is just one of hundreds of examples of the many vulnerable women we support. Through our work we often find that the ultimate victim of poverty is the female. In most cases, they are classed as secondary level citizens. They are extremely vulnerable, asset less and invisible on the socio-economic front. They do not have access to any form of financial credit and are denied rights to property. This results in further exploitation by mainstream society and our support is helping to turn their lives around by providing a comprehensive package of employment, training, guidance and renewed hope.

Our understanding

When we think of the poor, we often think of them in broad strokes. We think of a village devastated by a hurricane or a group of faceless beggars on the street or daily wage labourers huddled over a field. But our experience indicates that the poor are not one entity. Far from it, they are Gita, who feared her dark skin led to a bad marriage, or Indu, a member of India's marginalised dalit community, or Nirmila, whose husband will not let her work outside the house.

Much has been written about the meaning of poverty. Our experience suggests that poverty:

- deprives people of their security and well-being;
- deprives people not only of safe water and adequate food, clothing and shelter, but also education and healthcare;
- takes away people's rights, their freedom, dignity and peace of mind;
- puts people's lives in danger and robs them of their future.

"Every day I am afraid of the next"

Of course, poverty is not just about physical deprivation, it is also about lack of opportunity and loss of hope (poverty of spirit).

One could argue that: "Poverty is defined relative to the standards of living in a society at a specific time. People live in poverty when they are denied an income sufficient for their material needs and when these circumstances exclude them from taking part in activities which are an accepted part of daily life in that society."

India – context

India is a land of poverty and in many ways, of plenty. It is a nation both powerful and weak, ancient and modern. From the intertwining of its complex history, one can distill four important features which perhaps goes some way into explaining the India of today. They are;

- its diversity
- the depth of its culture
- a land of minorities
- a clash between two worlds

India is a melting pot of cultures. It is a country hosting 15 official languages, over 300 minor languages and some 3,000 dialects. Twenty four languages have more than one million speakers, but this in itself is not the only diversity.

There are four principal social groupings, what are commonly known as castes and several thousand sub-categories of the castes. Although predominantly Hindu, all the world's major religions are represented in India. Ethnic differences are also abound and this mosaic is culturally extraordinary. It is a source of divisiveness in a nation where particular loyalties have a deep meaning, both spiritually and physically. Given this diversity, it is remarkable that India has remained and grown and continues to grow, as one nation.

A country of contradictions

Linked to its diversity, India is a land of minorities. About 80 percent of the population are Hindus. An additional 12 percent are Muslims, deeply aware of their Islamic faith. Hindu, Urdu, Bengali, Marathi, Tamil, Telegu, Punjabi and other languages create minorities of their own. Tribal and neo-aboriginal peoples number almost 40 million.

Added to this diversity is her interaction between two worlds; the cities of India, where 20 percent of the population live and rural India, where about 600,000 villages contain the rest of the population. Urban India is the India of modern industry, national politics and foreign policy, government planning, the national media, the major universities, business, the armed forces, science and technology. Its best products are frequently as good as the best in the world, its orientation is cosmopolitan. Rural India is the India of age old patterns where tradition is the principal dynamic of society, where outsiders come and go but life continues, often without much change.

"If you want to do something and have no power to do it, it is poverty."

Corruption

Bribery exists everywhere and in many different forms but corruption in India sometimes looks like the civil servants' favourite pastime. Since 2005, India has been ranking mid-table (90 out of 180) of Transparency International's league table of country perception of corruption by the people (including investors, businessmen, etc).

Corruption affects all levels of society but it's by the administrative one that the biggest damage is done and comes to exacerbate poverty. The most mundane tasks cannot be performed without a bribe to the civil servant in charge of the paperwork.

Got your stuff stolen? Had a car accident? Need to register your name for a permit, a loan, a government grant or subsidy? Don't forget your bribe money. If you're actually trying to be a good law-abiding citizen, you pay your bribes and you end up even poorer than before. Bribes suck a significant share of the poor's income. To this end there is no doubt poverty and corruption are linked. In 2003, only 15% of the government's anti-poverty funds reached the poor. Anti-corruption laws have existed since 1968, supported by various Commissions and yet... failure has been the common point of these efforts.



So this in turn creates a kind of social pyramid whereby the lower your status within the pyramid, the less able you are to benefit from public resources. Within the lowest social layers the competition gets harder and harder until you hit the bottom layer with manual workers scattered in the slums, who aren't organised in groups, and hence receive nothing. In a way this type of corruption feeds on discrimination against the poor and the voiceless. These are the inconsequential citizens, those who aren't "somebody" and lack the connections to make their voices heard.

The need for a stronger government?

The Prime Minister, Narendra Modi's Swachh Bharat (Clean India) campaign is an admirable concept, envisioning as it does a squalor-free, presentable India. However we think this concept needs to be raised to a higher level, where bribery will cease to be profitable and where keepers of slush money will be hated rather than envied. India needs to prove to the world that gone are the days when short-term gains can be made by bending rules, cooking books and perpetrating frauds.

It has to be understood that the ending of corruption and improvement in governance have got to go hand in hand with sincere efforts to ensure transparency and strengthen the accountability mechanism. Only then can both the demand and supply side of corruption be dealt with. Will Modi grasp the nettle in fighting corruption in India and buck the trend to yield to populist short-term political gains? We can only hope, wait and see.

"Poverty is lack of freedom, enslaved by a crushing daily burden, by depression and fear of what the future will bring."

Divisive social structure

In terms of distinct groups, the population consists roughly of 16% Schedule Caste (SC). They are deemed to be the lowest in the caste hierarchy and historically called 'dalits'. They have and continue to experience untold misery and suffering and are still the most marginalised and some 8% are tribal people. There are Other Backward Caste (OBC) communities which have remained socially neglected, estimated to be in the region of 25 - 35% of the population. Combined together they form well over half of the Indian population (600 – 700 million).



NOTE: all of the above are Government definitions

Exclusion and marginalisation

Within this context the bacteria of caste division is clearly the weakening force in India. What started as the spiritual natural Karma based organisation of people in ancient India (some 2,500 years ago) has now degenerated into birth based inequalities and the ostracising of certain groups as 'filthy and untouchable'.

These vulnerable communities live isolated on the periphery of villages and towns, doing only those tasks considered "unfit" for the upper class. Their untouchability can be considered the worst form of rejection by mainstream society, comparable only with apartheid and human slavery. Mahatma Gandhi coined a dignified word "Harijan" (people or son of god) to address them. The Indian constitution made it illegal to use any form of derogatory language while addressing them. Indeed their very exclusion has turned them into the biggest concentration of poverty in the world.

The plight of women

The role of women becomes crucial in these families where the male contribution to the household income is low. If the men are fortunate they may have daily labour opportunities (which may be sporadic at best) or seasonal work and therefore a lot of spare time. Their frustrations boiling over due to lack of opportunities some men spend almost all their income on personal consumption like alcohol or tobacco. As a result, the family is heavily dependent on the earning potential of the women (and or children) for survival and a significant number of women are sole contributors to the family income.

Within these communities women are extremely vulnerable, asset less and invisible on the socio-economic front. They do not have access to any form of financial credit and are denied rights to property. They are therefore engaged in even greater menial work than their spouses and resort to subsistence occupations to eke out a meagre living.

Therefore, our work is centred on challenging the silent resignation of these women. Providing a range of programs that provide solace and inspiration in their fight to counter exploitation and indignity.

"My children were hungry and I told them the rice is cooking, until they fell asleep from hunger."

Our approach

At Kamla Foundation we aim to understand the 'whole' person, building relationships that respond to locally defined problems with culturally sustainable solutions. We are helping some of the most stigmatised members of Indian society develop their capacity to meet basic needs and create solutions to poverty and injustice....ultimately giving a 'voice' to those that have never had one. To achieve this we continue to venture where others remain reluctant to go, developing sustainable solutions rather than illusory quick-fixes and exploring the potential to move not just money but "minds and policies".

So here's what we are doing, we are taking into account an individual's life history and her distinct level of motivation. Capturing the whole story, from a woman's early childhood, transition to adulthood, her experience of the life opportunities (if any) she has been afforded and through this we are better able to understand how the circumstances of one ultra-poor household can dramatically diverge from another.

Listening to the poor

What if we actually 'listened' to the poor? Would it change the way we are able to give them a helping hand?

The voices of the poor are often forgotten and drowned out by a plethora of statistical analysis developed to understand and better the lives of the world's most in need. An individual's unique life experiences and personality is just as crucial to determining whether she will escape from poverty as the nature of the aid she receives.

We find that each person has different starting points, based on the circumstances of their life histories. In working with the extreme poor, we have learned that we need to 'listen' to them to understand how to customise our program of support to suit their individual needs. In doing so we are able to do such things as mediate in domestic disputes, provide employment support and empowerment training, or suggest lifestyle changes to promote better hygiene in the household. These changes help them realign their paths out of extreme poverty, with many realising their potential to "graduate" to a better quality of life.

From dependence to independence

Ultimately, poverty has many different faces, each one as unique as the next, each with strengths and weaknesses that can catalyse or inhibit an individual's journey out of their wretched existence.

Through our work, we are trying to better understand the mixture between poverty, spirituality and modernity which coexist in India today. It is the essence of Indian spirituality which enables even the most deprived to endure poverty and it is modernity which provides the prospect of improvement. It is within this context, a composite of many small individual visions and inspirations, which characterizes modern India and offers the best hope of uplifting the poor from abject poverty.

For us, it's not the investments that determine how any great organisation is judged, but the outcomes of those investments. Those outcomes are guided by our ability to innovate, influence, and in the end, generate impact. To this end, we continue our work 'breaking the cycle of dependency', providing hope and inspiration to thousands, improving their standing and helping them to gain acceptance back into wider society.

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