

The College Motto award 2014

Dr. Shobha Anna George & Dr. Ravi Ninan George

Shobha Anna Koshy joined Christian Medical College, Vellore in 1988. Shobha was one of the quieter members of the batch. To her closest friends, she was a rock and pillar of strength. She shouldered responsibility even from student days and took on the responsibility of the General Secretary of the Women's Hostel Association. Shobha was an active member of the SCM (Student Christian Movement) and in her own words, it taught her that loving God meant obeying Him completely and that faith is manifested in action. After completing her MBBS, Shobha did her service obligation with the CSI Chennai diocese in Chengalpattu and Kancheepuram in 1996.

Ravi joined MBBS in Manipal in 1985. He joined CMC as the first student in the DNB Family Medicine course in 1993. It was during Shobha's internship in CMC and Ravi's post graduate training in CMC that they first met and then embarked on this inspiring journey. Shobha and Ravi got married in 1994. Between 1996 and 2003, Shobha completed DCH and MRCPCH and Ravi completed his MRCS in the UK.

For both Shobha and Ravi, their primary aim together was always to show God's love to people through their medical work. They both strongly felt called to work in an area that badly needed doctors, but the question was 'where' !

After returning from the UK, they worked in the Christian Fellowship Hospital, Oddanchatram for 3 years while trying to decide the place they would work in. For both Shobha and Ravi, Oddanchatram was a place of much spiritual growth and mentorship. They had originally intended to stay there for a year before moving on; however, it was at that time that Shobha was diagnosed with a malignancy. This period now stretched to three years. During the course of her surgery and chemotherapy, a decision they thought would be easy to make, became heart-breakingly difficult. The difficulty for them was not deciding whether to continue their plan of working in an underserved area, but where. They were inundated with offers from various rural mission hospitals and it became obvious that there was a burning need for dedicated doctors all over rural India. During this period, they felt God leading them to work in the Asha Kiran Society, Lamtaput in Orissa. Shobha and Ravi joined the Asha Kiran Society in 2006 and have been here since.

The Asha Kiran Society was originally pioneered by three couples, three of whom were graduates of CMC, Vellore. Located in Koraput district of Southern Orissa, it is a breathtakingly beautiful and remote area surrounded by rolling hills. Koraput, Bolangir and Kalahandi (KBK) are the most backward districts in Orissa with predominantly tribal populations. They work in Koraput and Malkangiri districts, both of which are a part of the KBK area. In Koraput they work primarily in the Lamtaput block with tribals from 3 language groups. In Malkangiri, they work with the Bonda tribe – a very primitive tribal group. This area has very poor infrastructure in terms of roads, electricity, schools, hospitals

etc. Asha Kiran Hospital is a 40 bedded secondary level hospital. It is endemic for malaria and sickle cell disease – the main killers of the area. Like in any small hospital, they have to work in all specialities simultaneously. As Shobha stands at a sick patient's bedside, trying desperately to retrieve some nuggets of information learned during rounds in medical college, or when Ravi, operating on an acute abdomen finds a situation beyond his ability, it is then that they learn to recognize God's hand leading them. They have practically learned the truth that His grace is sufficient, for His strength is made perfect in our weakness.

In spite of the fact that Orissa is in India, they are very literally cross-cultural missionaries and doctors. Learning a new language was easy compared to trying to learn and understand the culture of the people. Steeped in centuries of animism, the absence of roads and other communication ensured that the tribals remained cut-off from the mainstream. The tribals understanding of their right to health was very primitive. Armed with their medical knowledge and skills Shobha and Ravi were prepared to improve the health of the tribal population. They found that health care was really very low on the tribal people's priority list. They would rather their lands were redeemed than their bodies. They would rather have provisions for good education and opportunities for their surviving children than an improvement in infant mortality. Shobha and Ravi were forced to learn the practical meaning and application of a holistic approach to health.

Their work involved a varied and dedicated group of people, but providing leadership to such a varied task force meant learning so much on the run. Leadership and management skills, the best farming methods, various education techniques, the best degree of slope for roofs in very wet weather, the fact that cows expel their placentas a few hours after the calf birth (and retention really does not require manual removal as Ravi tried to do)... the list is endless. They run a community services department that has at its backbone 12 local community supervisors and 120 village women who work as the primary health care providers at the grassroots. Various development programs, formation of village level organisations and liaising with government programs are part of their efforts. Two peripheral health centres have been started in areas where access to health care is particularly difficult. The agriculture department works with farmers to train them in organic methods of farming, soil and water conservation and agro-forestry. The educational wing runs 14 village multilingual education schools and three tuition centres for children attending government schools. They have just started an English medium school in Lamtaput.

As they say... there are still miles to go before they sleep...

In Shobha's own words, "Working in a mission hospital has opened our eyes to the wondrous ways that God acts on behalf of those who are faithful and obey His call. We watch His work going on, sometimes through us and our colleagues and a lot of times 'in spite of us'! While praying for spiritual transformation amongst the people we work with, we are well aware that He is slowly but surely transforming us. Learning to live in fellowship with other Christians, learning what it means to die a little every day so that the body of Christ might have life – these are wonderful lessons that God is teaching us and will continue to teach as long as our hearts and minds are open to Him".

The CMC Alumni Association is proud to present the College Motto Award 2014 to Drs. Shobha and Ravi George.