



# SHANTI children's project BHAVAN

## Thank You!

Welcome to our *Daughters of Destiny Watch Party Guide*! First and foremost, if you're hosting a Watch Party for friends or family, thank you! We can't think of a better way to enjoy the series.

The story of Shanti Bhavan and its children is hard to encapsulate, even in a work as ambitious as *Daughters of Destiny*. Condensing 20 years into four hours is tricky! In our experience, viewers often have questions after, and that's what this Watch Party Guide is for. We've listened to the questions that have been asked, and tried to anticipate those that haven't, and provided you with the best answers possible. It may help to peruse this packet before your guests arrive, so you're familiar with the material present. If you find after reading what's here that you want even more information, check out Glamour's recent interview with Director of Operations Ajit George; it's one of the best pieces to date about the work and history of Shanti Bhavan. ([www.glamour.com/story/daughters-of-destiny-netflix-poverty](http://www.glamour.com/story/daughters-of-destiny-netflix-poverty)).

Also, feel free to share any of this information with your guests!

Again, thank you for spreading the word! We're incredibly proud to share *Daughters of Destiny* with you, and we hope you enjoy it!

# Where Are They Now?

## Karthika

Karthika is now a lawyer in Delhi. Her success is a result of her upbringing at Shanti Bhavan, along with perseverance, dedication, and access to opportunities most children of her background never have. She hopes to give her family a better life.

## Manjula

Manjula has one-and-a-half years left in her nursing program. Her desire to help her family and community strengthens as she gets closer to graduation. She is eager to pay off her family's debt and to help her sister have a better life. She is looking forward to working in a clinic to provide medical services to individuals who have little or no access to healthcare.

## Preetha

Since the filming of *Daughters of Destiny*, Preetha has continued to grow as a confident young woman. Recently, Preetha's father passed away from alcohol-related complications. The death of her father has motivated her to develop a better relationship with her mother and brother. She graduates from college next year.

Preetha still dreams of being a singer, but the pursuit of her dream remains complex due to the immense debt her family faces. She is studying political science and history and hopes to find a job that ignites new passions in her.

## Thenmozhi

As she comes of age, Thenmozhi has begun to realize how different her life is from her siblings. Her 12-year-old brother already has a job gathering banana leaves for which he receives his salary in meals, and her older sister suffers from a growth disorder that keeps her secluded in the house. Thenmozhi continues to navigate between Shanti Bhavan and her life at home, with the hope that someday she'll be able to improve her family's life.

Thenmozhi loves animals and wants to be a veterinarian when she grows up.

## Shilpa

Shilpa has graduated with a Master's in Psychology. In the spirit of Shanti Bhavan's mission of helping 100 others, Shilpa is currently working as a teacher at Shanti Bhavan and at a major clinic in Bangalore for children with developmental disorders. Shilpa's memoir, *The Elephant Chaser's Daughter*, about her struggle to balance her two worlds – where she was born into, and where she aspires to live – has now been published in India.

# FAQ

## **What is Shanti Bhavan?**

Shanti Bhavan is a non-profit residential school in Tamil Nadu, India, providing free, high-quality education to the region's poorest children. The school is comprised of a central academic building, multipurpose spaces for assembly and performances, separate dormitories for boys and girls of different ages, a playground for the younger children, a basketball court, an athletic field, and residences for permanent staff and volunteer.

## **Where is the Shanti Bhavan boarding school located?**

Shanti Bhavan's current boarding school is located in Tamil Nadu, 1.5 hours southeast of Bangalore. We are currently raising funds to build a second school. Support our efforts at [shantibhavanchildren.org](http://shantibhavanchildren.org).

## **When was Shanti Bhavan founded?**

Shanti Bhavan is a non-religious 501(c)(3) non-profit organization founded in 1997 by professor, entrepreneur, and author Dr. Abraham George.

## **How does Shanti Bhavan differ from other schools serving the poor?**

No other program offers world class education, intensive intervention, or continual support while still being completely free of charge. Our focus is achieving results through top-level education, long-term mentoring, and professional guidance.

## **How long does Shanti Bhavan provide support for its children?**

A student typically joins Shanti Bhavan at age four. Shanti Bhavan provides support until that student graduates from college, and even beyond. In their pursuit of professional careers, we continue to guide and mentor them.

## **How much does it cost to support one child for an entire year?**

One year of 24/7 care, food, clothing, shelter, top-level education, mentorship, medical care, and access to arts and athletics programs costs roughly \$1,600 per student at our residential school. While in college, costs are approximately \$3,200 per student per year.

**Where do Shanti Bhavan children come from?**

Children recruited to Shanti Bhavan come from families that earn less than \$2 a day. 60% of the children come from rural villages and 40% from urban slums. 95% of the children also belong to the Dalit caste (formerly known as the “untouchables”). Our students primarily come from the states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

**How are Shanti Bhavan children selected?**

Children are selected by an experienced recruitment team using the following criteria: 1) the family must be under the poverty threshold of \$2.00 per day, with preference given to single parent households, 2) the family must be committed to keeping the child at Shanti Bhavan for the duration of the program, and 3) the family must pledge not to withdraw the child early for marriage or work purposes.

**Are all the girls from *Daughters of Destiny* poor? Are all the children of Shanti Bhavan poor?**

Yes, all of Shanti Bhavan’s children come from families who make less than \$2.00 per day and, in many cases, much less.

Each child remains in the Shanti Bhavan program for 17+ years, during which time some families achieve a degree of financial stability. This happens rarely, but when it does, we’re very happy for it! It means those children might gain a slightly more stable foundation upon which to build their adult lives.

More common is the reality that poverty doesn’t always look like poverty as we imagine it. While it’s true that many of our children come from homes that are little better than ramshackle huts without electricity or plumbing, such obvious visual cues do not tell the real story. Instead, we must look for markers all too often invisible to casual observation, including poor nutrition, physical or sexual abuse, alcoholism, large debts, chronic illnesses, high suicide rates, and early mortality. To eradicate poverty, our view must expand to include this more complex portrait of what poverty is.

Poverty is more than a lack of money. It is a multifaceted problem that can permanently and negatively impact lives at ages as young as 2 or 3. Some of the hidden markers of poverty include:

### **How does Shanti Bhavan deal with the complex problem of poverty?**

- **Lack of electricity** makes it impossible for a child to study.
- **Poor nutrition** can impair a child's mental, physical, and emotional growth in ways that can not be corrected for later.
- **Poor hygiene** contributes to illness.
- **Lack of healthcare** can lead to illness or disability.
- **Lack of availability of toilets** forces girls to walk a mile or more for privacy.
- **Unsafe living or working conditions** (and many of our children go with their parents to work) can lead to injury or disability.
- **Sexual abuse, alcoholism, and other damaging behaviors** are disproportionately present in impoverished communities.

We address these issues by offering a clean, safe, and supportive environment that provides each child with clothes, nutritional meals, medical care, and the proper facilities to grow and learn. We admit 24 children each year – 12 boys and 12 girls – to ensure that each child has ample resources and the individualized attention from staff and volunteers to be able to succeed in a rigorous academic program.

### **What subjects are taught at Shanti Bhavan?**

Students take classes ranging from chemistry, physics, mathematics, and computers to Hindi, English, creative writing, civics, geography, and literature.

### **What types of extracurricular opportunities are available at Shanti Bhavan?**

Students can participate in choir, music lessons, dance, public speaking, debate, trivia, spelling bee, leadership classes, soccer, volleyball, basketball, and more. There is also a biannual arts camp held in September and June each year.

### **Why are classes at Shanti Bhavan taught in English?**

We are preparing our children to be global citizens, able to pursue professions of their choice. Our curriculum adheres to the highest national standards, set forth by the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE). The 10th and 12th grade board exams set forth by the CISCE are given in English, and in order to best prepare our students for these exams, the language of instruction at Shanti Bhavan is English.

**What resources are available for students struggling academically at Shanti Bhavan?**

If we notice that one of our children is not performing well academically, we offer a wide variety of support. This can include peer-to-peer tutoring, individual help from teachers, mentorship from graduates and older students, and access to volunteers with expertise in various subjects.

**Does Shanti Bhavan support its children through college?**

Yes! Shanti Bhavan helps cover college tuition and room and board for all of its graduates. Some families have done a little better over the years and we ask them to contribute to their child's education during college. For those families who are unable to, Shanti Bhavan covers the full amount.

Most education NGOs stop tracking their children once they graduate from a program. They mark success by whether a child is "literate" or not, or whether they have passed certain tests/criteria. However, once these children leave the NGO or education program, they do not have the tools, support, or ability to further their education or acquire meaningful jobs. Within 5 years, many of them return to the same circumstances—abject poverty—from which they started.

Most of the parents of Shanti Bhavan children are "literate" and have had some form of education. All of them are still poor – literacy did not help them escape poverty.

Shanti Bhavan marks success not by whether their children are literate, or whether they have passed a specific test, but where their children are five years after they graduate from the program.

**Where are Shanti Bhavan children 5 years after college?**

- 97% of all of our children graduate from high school.
- All of our high school graduates have been accepted into top universities across India.
- 98% of our children graduate from college.
- 97% of our children go onto work full-time at multinational companies including Amazon, Deloitte, EY, Goldman Sachs, JP Morgan, Mercedes Benz and more.
- All of our working graduates are the primary or sole income-earner for their families.
- Our working graduates give back 20-50% of their salaries to their families, communities and others in need, tackling a variety of issues: basic necessities, housing, healthcare, education for siblings, repayment of generational debt and much more.

Shanti Bhavan marks success by whether a child is elevated out of poverty, remains out of poverty and can uplift their families and others from poverty, impacting dozens or hundreds of others in need.

**Does Shanti Bhavan encourage students to pursue careers in the arts?**

We strongly encourage our students' involvement in the arts; in fact, we believe the arts are essential to any person's growth and development. To that end, we provide instruction in music, dance, choir, visual art, debate, and drama. Twice a year we host a ten day art camp, where visiting artists share and teach performance, film-making, songwriting, and so much more. Many of our students have earned accolades and won awards for their poetry, writing, and photography. Every holiday, graduation, and special event at Shanti Bhavan is filled with dance, music, singing, and performances by students of all ages. Some of our graduates, like Shilpa, have gone on to write memoirs.

As a career, the arts are an extremely challenging professional choice in India. Ultimately, every Shanti Bhavan alum will have to make choices and navigate Indian society in the way that seems right for them, but unlike their middle- and upper-class peers, there is little safety net between them and crushing poverty and rampant discrimination. We have a responsibility to our children and their families—who all have deep debt and tremendous financial need—to start them in their adult lives on the most stable footing possible. They need every tool and advantage at their disposal to succeed, and to that end, we encourage our graduates to pursue professional options that provide financial certainty and security. But our working graduates are all still very young—just a few years out of college. They have a lot of life ahead of them, and we're excited to see where they go and what they do, especially when they pursue the arts as part of their lives.

**Are children involved in helping their communities? If so, how?**

Yes! From day one, Shanti Bhavan instills within its children the importance of helping others in need. Shanti Bhavan children are passionate about uplifting their communities, whether it is conducting classes in their villages, serving as role models for younger brothers and sisters, or educating their families on hygiene and health. Following college graduation, they seek leadership opportunities and jobs to bring about positive change in their communities. Additionally, many college and working graduates regularly return to Shanti Bhavan to teach and mentor younger students.

**Why does Shanti Bhavan select only one child per family?**

Our goal is to end the cycle of poverty through a long-term, holistic intervention. This level of commitment means that, as an institution, we believe we can do the most good by spreading our resources to the greatest number of families possible. We hope that our graduates will go on to uplift their families and communities.

**Why does Shanti Bhavan send their children back to their families over break?**

Shanti Bhavan's mission is to empower young children to uplift their families and communities. We understand that school breaks are an important time for students to reconnect with relatives and friends.

**Who helps run Shanti Bhavan?**

Shanti Bhavan maintains a highly competent and dedicated team of full-time faculty, administrative staff, and support personnel. This team includes full-time Indian teachers who work at the school year-round, administrative staff to oversee the day-to-day operations, caretakers, maintenance, kitchen staff, and security. Shanti Bhavan also recruits qualified international volunteers to help carry out the institution's mission.

**Who are Shanti Bhavan's volunteers?**

Shanti Bhavan's volunteer staff is comprised of people from all over the world. These individuals come to Shanti Bhavan to share their talents for a minimum of one month, although many choose to stay longer. These volunteers help to support Shanti Bhavan's full-time staff of dedicated teachers.

**Why did Shanti Bhavan experience a financial crisis?**

Shanti Bhavan was primarily funded by Dr. George in its initial years. In 2008, he and his family lost most of their assets during the global financial crisis. This made it impossible for him to remain the sole supporter of Shanti Bhavan.

**How did Shanti Bhavan recover from the financial crisis?**

Shanti Bhavan's recovery from the 2008 crisis was spearheaded by its Director of Operations, Ajit George, and aided by longtime friends, supporters, and partners. Now Shanti Bhavan relies on a mixed model of support through individual donations, corporate and NGO partnerships, and grants.

**Is Shanti Bhavan looking to build another boarding school in India?**

Yes! We have begun the process of raising enough capital to begin building our second residential school. Our ultimate goal is to implement Shanti Bhavan schools all across India.

**Is Shanti Bhavan a registered non-profit?**

Yes, Shanti Bhavan is a registered non-profit in the U.S. and India. It is a 501(c)(3) non-profit charity in the U.S., and also registered under the Indian Trust Act. It has 80-G tax exemption status and is FCRA approved in India.

**If I donate, is my donation tax deductible?**

Yes!

**How can I support Shanti Bhavan?**

You can donate financially to Shanti Bhavan's future at our website: <https://www.shantibhavanchildren.org/donate/>.

If you are 18 years of age or older, you can volunteer at Shanti Bhavan. More information about volunteering can be found at <http://www.shantibhavanchildren.org/volunteer/>.