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# WHEN FAMILY WALKS AWAY, HUMANITY STEPS IN

-Anousha Vashisht<sup>1</sup>

Maheshwari's fight for survival began on the day he was born. He was diagnosed with brain tumor and multiple other health complications, which marked a fragile start to his life. Unwilling to bear the burden of taking care of him, his mother chose to abandon him at birth. Similarly, his father, demoralised in the face of his responsibilities, abandoned Maheshwari too. Not just Maheshwari, his father decided to rid himself of all responsibilities he would have towards his family and chose to admit his own mother in the care of a shelter home too. But what seemed like an end was a new beginning; they found not just refuge, but family within the compassionate walls of The Earth Saviours Foundation (TESF) in Gurgaon.

While Maheshwar battled his illness, his grandmother, despite her own sickness, became a pillar of love and strength for everyone around her. Fondly called "Dadi" by residents and staff, she became the heart of the foundation, a symbol of resilience, warmth, and unconditional affection for all who crossed her path. Maheshwar and her grandmother are one of many such persons who are being taken care at the foundation.

The foundation was started by Late Shri Ravi Kalra ji in 2008. After his demise on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2021, his philanthropic work was carried forward by his 21 year old son (now 25) Mr. Jas Kalra. At such a young age, he took the responsibility of carrying the whole foundation on his own without asking for any support from the government or any international entity. Jas Kalra gave up his dreams to mend broken lives. With a calm voice and a healing smile, he becomes a source of strength for the forgotten, choosing compassion over comfort and love over ambition.

In a world where tolerance is shrinking and self-interest often takes over kindness, there are silent victims we never talk about i.e. the abandoned elderly, the disabled, and the forgotten souls. Every corner of The Earth Saviours Foundation tells a story of pain, survival, and unexpected hope. Why has the society become so intolerant? Why are those who gave us life- our parents and elders, been left and relentlessly tied at the gates of such shelter homes? One of the most disheartening

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observations made was those who leave their parents in such shelter homes are usually dropping them off in their BMW's and Mercedes as told by the team of the foundation.

Perhaps somewhere along the way, in chasing our dreams and building our own lives, we forgot the hands that once held us steady. We grew so busy seeking success and comfort that we lost touch with our own values and morals. In a world that glorifies youth and speed, we have ignored those who moved slowly, who needed more time, more care and even a sense of belonging. While running behind fame and materialistic possessions we have neglected the duty to take care of our elders who raised us up to what we are today. And in forgetting them, we have forgotten a part of ourselves. Whatever the reason, the reality is brutal, people who once **surrendered** their aspirations for their children are now seen as burdens.

My family and I have been associated with the foundation since 2019. However, when I started working at the foundation as an intern recently, it was then that I finally connected with the foundation's residents and learned about their personal experiences of suffering and survival. As I was born in a joint family, while growing up I was surrounded by my grandparents, parents, uncle, aunt, cousins with constant love, laughter and endless beautiful childhood memories. Here, it was different. I saw hundreds of abandoned senior citizens, physically and mentally disabled people, all seeking not just shelter, but dignity and company. Each story I heard was a powerful reminder of the importance of sensitivity in a world that often turns a blind eye.

Despite such unimaginable sorrow, TESF provides a ray of hope. The foundation though cannot replicate a true home filled with lifelong memories offers something which is laudable; a safe space, unconditional love and a second chance at life. Every resident that I interacted with in the foundation was grateful and happy to land up there and create new families, stitched together not by blood, but by shared healing.

Over the years, TESF has rehabilitated thousands. More than 3000 people have been reunited with their families after long searches with the help of local administration. Others have lived out their remaining days with dignity and love under the foundation's care. Once lost and scavenging through garbage for a single meal a day, they now sit with warm smiles, sharing their stories over three nourishing meals, their dignity slowly being restored.

The foundation operates with limited resources and limited hands. Only a handful of selfless individuals stretch their efforts every single day to provide food, medical care, and emotional

support to those who have no one else. Mr. Jas believes, "The opportunity to serve others is a divine blessing bestowed upon a chosen few by the Almighty."

The efforts of the father and son duo were recognized at the highest levels. The former was honored with several prestigious awards, including the Rashtriya Manav Sewa Ratna Samman (2014), the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Award (2011), and a recognition by the World Book of Records, London (2019), among many others during his lifetime. The latter was also awarded numerous honors, such as the Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam National Award, the Rajiv Gandhi Global Symposium Award, and the United Nations Global Peace Ambassador Award, to name a few. But for Jas, the real reward lies in every life saved, every smile restored, and every soul given a second chance. Jas has even personally overseen the cremation of over 3,000 unclaimed bodies, earning respect as the youngest non-priest to carry out such sacred duties. Through TESH and Jas Kalra's leadership, the forgotten find family, the abandoned find belonging, and broken lives find healing. This movement represents simple kindness which serves as a dignified revolution and highlights the power of hope to shine in even the most challenging situations.

The shelter, which already cares for more than 1,200 abandoned souls, is preparing to build the world's largest free of cost shelter home. Which would accommodate almost 5000+ residents. While this expansion is a noble and much-needed effort, it raises a painful question: why must we expect that 5,000 more human beings will be abandoned? Why is society preparing to forget so many?

The real, long-term solution does not lie only in building bigger shelters. It lies in rebuilding our hearts. It lies in teaching future generations the values of empathy, patience, and respect for the elderly and vulnerable. It lies in holding ourselves accountable for creating a more compassionate society where abandonment is not a casual option. Until then, organizations like TESH remain our society's true heroes, quietly filling the void that should never have been created in the first place.

