

India's Youth and the Promise of Opportunity

India is a young country—with one of the largest youth populations in the world. Yet, a significant proportion of our young people remain either in informal employment or under-employed, with jobs that don't fully match their potential. Addressing this challenge requires urgent investment in skill development, the creation of gainful employment, and the ability to harness emerging global opportunities. In fact, India's stated policy focus on youth resonates strongly with LVPEI's mission—ensuring not just healthcare access, but also the creation of life-changing employment pathways for India's youth. Enabling these young people to find meaningful, fulfilling work is not just essential to their future—it is essential to ours.

At LVPEI, we witness this potential every day. Our network spans 311 centres across four Indian states, and we also support the Liberia Eye Center in Monrovia. A significant proportion of our workforce comprises allied ophthalmic personnel—young, energetic, and committed youngsters most of whom are trained in-house. Many of them come from rural hinterlands and disadvantaged backgrounds. Yet, through opportunity, mentoring, and purpose-driven work, they grow into healthcare professionals delivering world-class care.

The LVPEI Ethos: Excellence with Equity

At the core of LVPEI's vision lies a simple but powerful idea: excellence with equity. Our founder, Dr. G. N. Rao, envisioned a system where world-class eye care would be available to all, regardless of a patient's ability to pay. As the institute expanded, we recognized that affordability and quality were only part of the equation. Access, especially for those in rural and underserved regions, was equally vital. Even the latest vision loss prevalence data from India shows that blindness continues to be more prevalent in rural areas, compared to urban zones.

This understanding gave rise to our pyramidal model of eye care delivery—a tiered, interconnected network that reaches deep into rural India. But enabling such access required a skilled and committed workforce willing to serve in these areas. This led us to adopt task shifting as a core strategy and training local youth to become vital contributors to eye care delivery. That changed everything.

Over the first decade of our journey, this model took root. We cultivated a patient-first ethic—professionalism, courtesy, effort, and focused attention—that, when fully expressed, results in both clinical excellence and deep patient satisfaction.

Embedding Values, Creating Purpose

But how do we ensure these values are embraced at every level of the organization? How do we ensure that every team member finds purpose in their role?

This is the challenge—and opportunity—facing any large institution. When people see purpose in their work, they give their best. That's why, for me, the most rewarding part of visiting our centres is meeting our young colleagues—ambitious, driven, and eager to contribute. Their energy reminds me of our responsibility: to offer not just jobs, but a coherent framework of values and the opportunity to contribute meaningfully.

Ambition in the East

During a recent visit to our Bhubaneswar campus, I was deeply impressed by Mamata Rani Swain and Kirtee Mayee Sarangi. Their careers are a powerful testament to perseverance and growth.

Both began their careers in 2006 as ophthalmic nursing assistants (ONAs), coming from small villages—Danpur and Keraragarh—in the Kendrapada district of Odisha. These are quiet, opportunity-scarce places. Kirtee grew up with seven siblings, and Mamata lost her father at the age of eight. Both chose to study science after school dreaming of a career in health. Kirtee had topped her school, and Mamata was deeply committed to her education.

Twenty years ago, they boarded a train for the first time in their lives to attend LVPEI's ONA interviews in Berhampur. They were among the first group selected for the new campus we were building in Bhubaneswar, Odisha's capital city. A group of young, nervous girls came to Hyderabad for training—but they had much to gain. Dr. Taraprasad Das, who led the Bhubaneswar initiative, assured Mamata she had found a new father figure in him.

Over two decades, both women rose steadily through the ranks, eventually managing the retina and oculoplasty operating rooms, anticipating each step in complex surgeries, and ensuring seamless operations. Today, Kirtee serves as the administrator of the Bhubaneswar campus overseeing everything from the garden to inventory. Mamata is the administrator in-charge of the centre's patient care services. Together, they are building a team that mirrors their commitment to service, excellence, and community.

A Hat-Trick

Just a few weeks ago, Raghava Chary's email lit up our inboxes—he had won the Grand Prize for Anterior Segment at the 2025 American Academy of Optometry's Photo Contest. His stunning image of an iris melanoma, a rare cancerous tumour, marked his third consecutive win at the AAO's clinical photo competition.

Raghava hails from a small hamlet near our Thoodukurthy secondary centre in Nagarkurnool district, Telangana. He too had always aspired to work in healthcare, which led him to join LVPEI as a vision technician student. After working in primary care at a rural vision centre, he went on to complete his optometry degree at LVPEI.

Today, he is part of the glaucoma team at our Kallam Anji Reddy campus in Hyderabad. He has taken a special interest in clinical photography and, supported by his team, has co-authored 13 research papers. His passion for innovation and excellence reflects the very best of what LVPEI stands for.

A Shared Commitment

Kirtee, Mamata, and Raghava are exceptional examples of what is possible when talent meets opportunity. They embody the values of commitment, hard work, and service, and they've made the most of what LVPEI offers—be it through education, training, or the diligent practice of their craft.

Each of them expresses their purpose in their own way—through clinical excellence, managerial leadership, or academic contribution—but they all share a profound dedication to the mission of healthcare delivery. They offer a model of what gainful, meaningful, and life-expanding employment can truly look like.

In them, we see the future of India's youth. And through them, we are reminded of our responsibility—to guide, to support, and to create pathways to a brighter, healthier world. If we succeed in this—if we can match the drive of our youth with the challenges of public health—we will not only transform the lives of individuals but also change the world around them.

-Prashant Garg