

**PBS: The Charlie Rose Show
Dr. Abraham George
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CHARLIE ROSE: India has experienced rapid growth in the past decade. Everybody knows that fact. It is often written about. Yet some 350 million people in the country still live in extreme poverty. Joining me now is Abraham George. He is the author of the recent book, "India Untouched: The Forgotten Face of Rural Poverty." He also started a foundation and a school for children in India. The school was featured in Tom Friedman`s documentary on outsourcing, and here is a look at the school.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

THOMAS FRIEDMAN, NEW YORK TIMES: It must be an amazing leap, though, for these kids, coming from the village, to be doing Excel.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Right, but there is no difference between them and any other children.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: What would you like to be when you grow up?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: An astronaut.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: Astronaut? What would you like to be?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: I`d like to be a doctor.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Pediatrician.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: A poet.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: Do you write poetry now already?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Yes.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: Oh, that`s wonderful. That`s a great thing to want to be.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Physics and chemistry.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN: Physics and chemistry. Wow.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

CHARLIE ROSE: I`m pleased to have Abraham George here to talk about this book.

Here is what`s interesting about Tom Friedman`s foreword. Tom Friedman frequently comes on the show and is well flown to the audience here. The school, he talks about, was started by Abraham George who came back to India with a single mission -- to start a privately financed boarding school that would take India`s most deprived children and prove that if you give them access to the same technologies and the same education

that other enabled -- that have enabled other Indians to thrive in globalization, those underprivileged children could thrive, too.

I am pleased to have Abraham George here to talk about the phenomenon. Welcome.

ABRAHAM GEORGE: Thank you for inviting me.

CHARLIE ROSE: Tell me why you do this?

ABRAHAM GEORGE: Well, I have been here in the United States for 25 years, and I'm an American. And I felt that I should give something back, I should return and work among the poor, and give them the opportunity that I had when I came here, you know, to have a good education and have a good career. So this is my turn.

CHARLIE ROSE: So you -- that's a noble idea. Lots of noble ideas die along the wayside, victims of all kinds of things.

ABRAHAM GEORGE: Yes.

CHARLIE ROSE: How were you able to do it, and what did you do?

ABRAHAM GEORGE: Well, I came back to India with the idea that I should take children from the poorest of the poor, the so-called untouchables of India, and give them the same opportunity that people from -- children from rich families have. And -- but I have learned in the United States, as a businessman, is that if you really work hard at it, you can accomplish it.

And so going back to India, working with the children in the school that I started offering world-class education, I just kept going, despite all the obstacles that I faced in accomplishing it.

CHARLIE ROSE: What have you.

ABRAHAM GEORGE: It's been 10 years.

CHARLIE ROSE: And what have you learned? And what has been the result?

ABRAHAM GEORGE: The main lesson is that if you give opportunity to children, regardless of their backgrounds, they will succeed. We are talking about children from the poorest of the poor, below -- families with income below 50 cents a day, for a family of four, and they have not seen -- they have never written on a piece of paper or used a pencil or a pen. And we take children at the age of 4, and 10 years later, finding that these children are just as good, just as excellent as any other, you know, who have gone to very good boarding schools.

CHARLIE ROSE: And what does that say to you?

ABRAHAM GEORGE: It simply says that those who have the ability to help...

CHARLIE ROSE: Those who have access -- first of all, those who have access to the same kinds of instruction, the same kinds of tools and the same kind of nurturing have a chance.

ABRAHAM GEORGE: That's correct. And we owe them. We owe these poor children from poor homes. There is an idea -- the concept usually is that the poor don't deserve those types of things. They need to be taken out of the street, or they need -- they may be given some skill so that they can have another job. But the idea that the poorest of poor can excel, can be doctors, engineers, whatever they are, that concept is not very much embraced by the world. And I'm trying to prove that children from these types of backgrounds can also succeed.

CHARLIE ROSE: Why isn't it embraced by the world?

ABRAHAM GEORGE: I guess that because of the large numbers that we are dealing with. We are talking about, in India alone, I believe that over 50 percent of the people are poor, below one dollar a day. In the world, you are talking about almost 3 billion people. So you know, how do you provide institutions of excellence to lots of people?

But the idea that I had was that yes, you cannot probably do that for everyone, but sure, among the poor, there are children who have the potential to succeed. And those who have the privilege of making money ought to go back and try and give them that opportunity.

CHARLIE ROSE: And what has it given you?

ABRAHAM GEORGE: It has given me a lot of satisfaction. It's been wonderful to see the children, you know, each year, doing better, just like my own children. You know, it's a great satisfaction. I just keep doing my work and seeing them grow.

CHARLIE ROSE: And the excitement they have, you see with Tom Friedman, the excitement about computers, I mean, you introduce computers to kids and it does what for them? It just.

ABRAHAM GEORGE: It does wonders. Computers are just another tool. They play the piano, they, you know, they perform dances, and they study like any other children, mathematics and all the other subjects, just like any one of the good schools anywhere, boarding schools.

CHARLIE ROSE: Jeffrey Sachs was here. You know Jeffrey Sachs.

ABRAHAM GEORGE: Yes. Yes, yes.

CHARLIE ROSE: You know, he is on a crusade. He believes that with the right amount of resources, we can eliminate poverty in the world and certainly make a stab at it sooner rather than later. Do you believe that?

ABRAHAM GEORGE: I wrote an article, which was -- which was published recently. I feel -- I believe that money alone is not going to solve the problem. One of the reasons for poverty is that -- is poor governance. I do not believe that corrupt governments and inefficient bureaucracies are going to deliver the goods. Yes, money will help, but we

have to find a different model for delivering the services and giving the opportunities to the poor.

CHARLIE ROSE: What's the model?

ABRAHAM GEORGE: The model that I see is that first, that money is being channeled by donors and international organizations through governments. And many of these governments are corrupt. And like Rajiv Gandhi, the former prime minister of India said, hardly 15 cents to a dollar finally gets to the -- you know, ultimate to beneficiary. So.

CHARLIE ROSE: And why is that?

ABRAHAM GEORGE: Because of all the middlemen.

CHARLIE ROSE: Corruption, middlemen.

ABRAHAM GEORGE: Yes. And then.

CHARLIE ROSE: Politics, competition for the.

ABRAHAM GEORGE: It is corruption, inefficiencies. People of bureaucracy, a whole lot of reasons. And poor planning. A range of things. And I do not think that people who don't have any risks to take would do the right thing. And so the model has to be that we have to figure out ways with private institutions, not necessarily governments, to take part in the development.

CHARLIE ROSE: Are private institutions ready to do that?

ABRAHAM GEORGE: Yes, they are. Right now, there isn't much profit to be made in rural areas, because people are poor. But if the government would create an environment whereby it -- they have the incentive to take -- undertake projects in the rural area. For example, if the government would provide tax holidays for opening up factories in rural areas or.

CHARLIE ROSE: Tax holidays?

ABRAHAM GEORGE: Yes, for a period of five years.

CHARLIE ROSE: Oh, I see. Right. Right, right.

ABRAHAM GEORGE: Or offer low-interest loans and so on, they may be willing to set up factories, and, you know, start companies that are in the agricultural sector, for example processing of food packaging. You know, take, for example, the whole industry surrounding alternate medicine, you know, ginseng and products like that. They're all grown in the villages, but the processing is taking place in the urban area. So these health products and so on, you know, companies can move into the villages and do that. Carpet industry, paper industry, leather industry, cement -- a whole range of industries can be moved into the rural areas.

CHARLIE ROSE: Is Prime Minister Singh on board in this?

ABRAHAM GEORGE: So far what I have seen is that the government is trying to offer credit to landlords who want to do farming. The beneficiaries are going to be a few people, mainly the landlords, and a few officials who can start businesses. But the trick is, how do you give opportunity to 500 million people? I haven't seen anything that has changed.

CHARLIE ROSE: It seems like an insurmountable challenge, but most challenges are there to be surmounted.

ABRAHAM GEORGE: Yes, absolutely.

CHARLIE ROSE: So what's, I mean, 500 million people?

ABRAHAM GEORGE: I believe -- there is so much land and unused land. The problem is that there is no water for people to cultivate. And where there is water, there is less poverty. And so one of the things that the government will have to do is improve the infrastructure. Make rivers, divert rivers and canals so the water is available, electricity available, make roads. You know, those are the things that the government can do. But at the end of the day, what we have to provide for is the poor having the opportunity to own land. And that is something that we have been trying to do in our foundation's work in India.

CHARLIE ROSE: Tell me about the school of journalism.

ABRAHAM GEORGE: Journalism school was started because of my frustration with the government and the press. The media wasn't willing to write about the corruption and all the things that are wrong within the society. Maybe there is a certain level of fear that the government may retaliate.

So I decided that I'd start a school for journalism and train 20 or 30 young people on the noble values that they should cultivate in the profession. And so today, it is one of the best journalism schools in India.

CHARLIE ROSE: And are we having more reporting coming out of India now about corruption and fraud and the inability of government and private sector to respond to critical human needs?

ABRAHAM GEORGE: The stories appear for a day, but they just disappear as fast as they appeared. Maybe they get a phone call from a government official, and the media is unwilling to carry that forward.

CHARLIE ROSE: This book is called "India: The Forgotten Face of Rural Poverty." "Untouched."

"An astounding work of great significance," said "The Times of India."

We, all of us need to understand the problems of poverty. We have devoted a number of programs to it, and it's easy to do that, to devote programs to it. It's much harder to do something about it. But there seems to be in some ways -- a person said the first step is recognition that we are in a crisis and have to do something. And because of books like

this and other things, people are beginning to understand that a response is not just necessary, but it is imperative and essential.

"India Untouched," again. Abraham M. George. Thank you for joining us. See you next time.

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