



2026 FOUNDERS' LETTER

A Decade of Learning

Shilpa and Amit Singhal

Founders

shilpa@sitare.org · amit@sitare.org

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THE DECADE IN NUMBERS

672

Students through our
school program

23

First university
graduates, 2026

12.4×

Upliftment in family
income

268

Students in Sitare
University

We started Sitare Foundation in May 2016 with a bold yet deeply personal mission: *to transform 50,000 lives through education by 2050*. Our vision was simple: identify exceptionally bright students from underprivileged backgrounds and provide them with the kind of world-class education we would want for our own children. What began as a humble idea has evolved into something quite meaningful. Over the past ten years, this journey has brought us moments of joy, hard-earned successes, unforeseen challenges, and above all, profound learnings.

Introduction

At Sitare Foundation, our mission has always been crystal clear: to transform the lives of bright underprivileged children by helping them become high earners through the power of education. In India, the path to economic mobility, especially for those born into poverty, runs most reliably through professional education.

The reality is stark: lifetime earning potential in India is highly bimodal. For students from disadvantaged backgrounds, gaining admission into a handful of elite institutions, such as the IITs, NITs, top medical colleges, or National Law Universities, can truly be life changing. These institutions open doors to stable, high-income careers. However, for those who don't make it through the highly competitive entrance exams for these elite institutions, the prospects are far more limited, often marked by a lifetime of financial struggle.

With a deep understanding of this landscape, we anchored Sitare's early success metric to a single, impactful outcome: how many of our middle- and high-school students gain admission to these top-tier professional colleges. From the beginning, we focused specifically on engineering and medicine, fields that have consistently delivered high economic returns for graduates.

To achieve this, we identified talented children, from financially struggling households, at the start of middle school (6th grade) and supported them with top tier education through high school (12th grade). Our belief was simple: a strong foundation through middle and high school would prepare these students to clear the nation's toughest entrance exams and change the trajectory of their lives.

Our approach shares similarities with successful models like Navodaya Vidyalayas and Vidyagyan by Shiv Nadar Foundation, both of which are residential. (Our program was non-residential.) Navodaya Vidyalayas, in particular, are worth highlighting. Launched in 1986 by the Indian government to support the country's brightest rural students, these residential schools select less than 1% of 6th-grade entrants and provide them with high-quality, English-medium education through grade 12. With about 650 schools across India, they have set an inspiring precedent.

We began with the assumption that selecting for high intellect and providing a quality education would be enough to propel our students into India's top colleges. Well, we were wrong!

Middle- and High-School Program

When we began our philanthropic journey in 2016, we selected fifty students from Jodhpur, Rajasthan, to join our program. We enrolled 25 students each in the sixth and seventh grades, full of hope that with the right support, they would thrive. Over the years, our initiative expanded to five cities, serving nearly 500 students at its peak across various grade levels.

MAY 2016 — WHERE IT ALL BEGAN



Our Founder Dr. Amit Singhal with Aspiring Applicants on May 21, 2016.

Our program has always been offered completely free of cost to the students, with one key expectation: scholarship renewal is contingent on maintaining a modest level of academic performance, assessed every 2–3 years. Despite setting a relatively low academic bar, we began noticing a concerning trend as our cohorts progressed:

- **Early enthusiasm gave way to declining performance.** Many students started strong, only to fall short within a couple of years. A significant number failed to meet even our basic academic requirements and lost their scholarships.
- **Even those who remained through Grade 12 struggled with college admissions.** Despite receiving top-tier education and test prep, very few students succeeded in securing seats at professional colleges outside of Sitare University.

We also briefly tested US college admissions for our first two cohorts and secured seven good admissions, but the model wasn't financially viable for the scale we wanted. Four of those seven

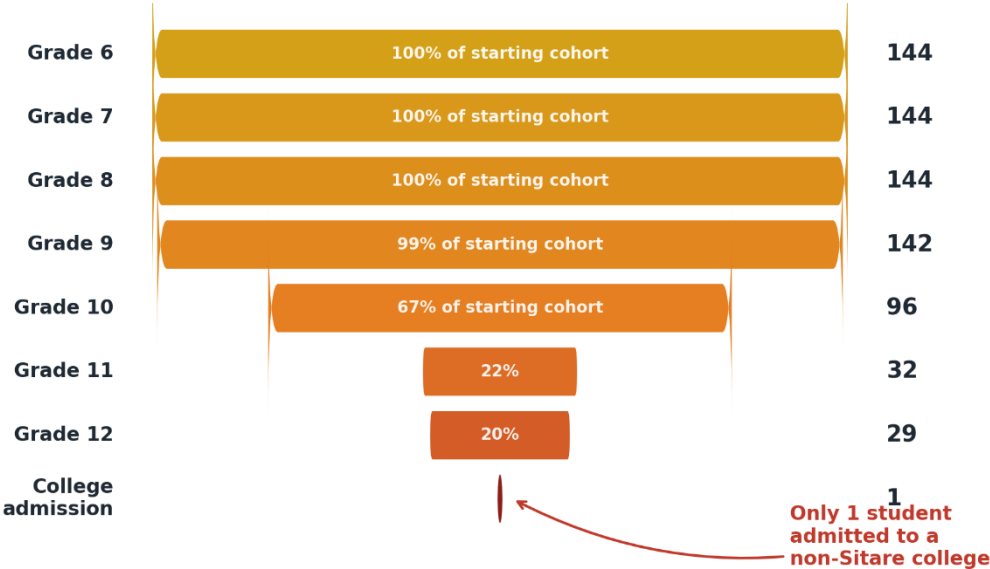
graduated from good US Universities this year and two will graduate in 2027 (one left the program and went back home).

An example of the concerning trend mentioned above is the graduating Class of 2024. We began with 144 sixth graders. By Grade 11, only 32 remained, and just one student secured admission into a non-Sitare college.

A N E X A M P L E C O H O R T

The 2017-2024 cohort, year by year

Of 144 sixth-graders we admitted in 2017, one reached a non-Sitare college.



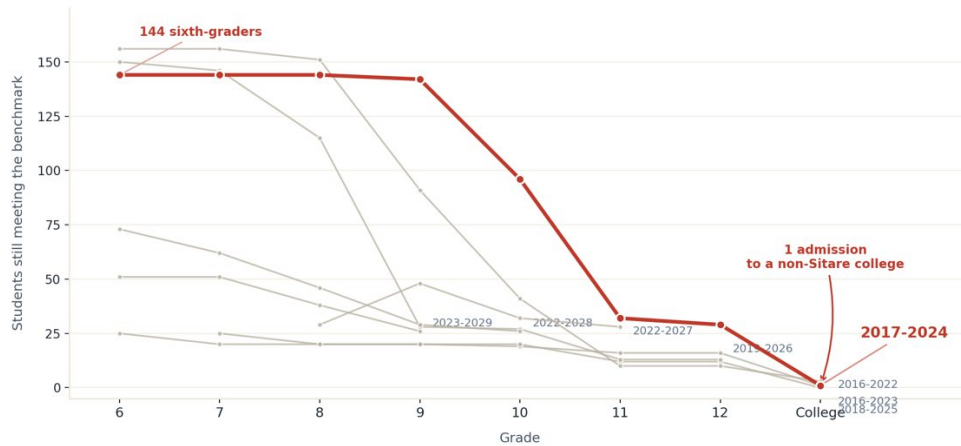
Source: Sitare Foundation cohort data. Numbers reflect students meeting the academic-renewal benchmark at each grade.

Here is a graph of all cohorts showing how many students had their scholarship renewed year after year based on their meeting of very modest academic performance benchmarks. The 13th grade on the x-axis is freshman year of college, and we are showing counts of students who got into independent Indian colleges, not counting Sitare University.

THE DATA — A DECADE OF COHORTS

Every cohort tells the same story

Across eight cohorts and a decade, the same shape: enrolment collapses long before college.



Source: Sitare Foundation cohort data. Counts reflect students meeting the academic-renewal benchmark. The 2017-2024 cohort is highlighted to match the funnel chart above.

Paradoxically, our students consistently outperform national averages, even when compared to those in expensive private schools. Independent assessments by [Educational Initiatives](#), show that within a year of joining our program, our students exceed the performance of privileged peers by 50–80% in every subject ([link](#)). Yet this improvement hasn't translated into success in ultra-competitive college entrance exams, where the real challenge is outperforming the top 1% of students nationwide.

THE SOBERING FACTS

90%

of students do not achieve 85% in CBSE exams

5 / 672

school students admitted to IIT, NIT, or NLU

Consider these sobering facts:

- 90% of our students do not achieve even 85% marks in CBSE exams, a basic benchmark.
- Of the 672 students that joined our school program, only five secured an admission into a national college (IIT, NIT, or NLU).

So what's going wrong? Here's what we've learned:

1. **Limited access to high-potential underprivileged students.** India's Navodaya system does an excellent job attracting and nurturing bright underprivileged children. Since we don't draw from that pool, many of our applicants are those who couldn't qualify for Navodaya admission in the first place.
2. **Non-residential model constraints.** Our students, who are already 2–3 years behind academically, need much more time and structure to catch up. However, logistical constraints in a non-residential model, such as reliance on partner school bus schedules, limit our contact hours. Worse yet, students return each day to home environments that often lack the support or stability necessary for sustained academic focus.
3. **Sustaining grit over time.** The educational path we ask our students to follow demands sustained effort over seven years, something difficult even under ideal circumstances. Many lose motivation after the initial years. Over time, some students begin to view the scholarship as a right, not a privilege, leading to complacency.
4. **Peer comparison and entitlement.** In their home environments, students often compare themselves to peers who have not had the same opportunities. This fosters a premature sense of achievement.
5. **Lack of ownership.** A structural challenge in charitable work is that recipients often have no direct stake in the outcome. Even if a student underperforms and exits the program, they've still benefited from years of high-quality education, while the foundation's core objective (enabling long-term socioeconomic mobility) remains unmet. In short, students gain either way, but the foundation bears a significant cost for incomplete outcomes.

The Residential Shift

Given these insights, we concluded that our non-residential model was no longer viable or effective, and in 2024 we converted to a fully residential program. The new structure provides more academic time in a controlled environment, free from the distractions and instability that had undermined so many of our students at home.

We are watching the results carefully. The early indications are not encouraging. Students who were already behind academically have not caught up at the rate we had hoped, and the fundamental challenge of preparing students to outcompete the top 1% nationwide in entrance exams has not changed. We have made the difficult decision to wind down this program over the next two years, ensuring every current student has a supported path to completion. Our energy and resources will move fully behind Sitare University, where we have seen the model actually work.

The Pivot

Even before we tried the residential model, the pattern across cohorts was clear enough to force a harder conversation. We had spent years investing in students at the front end of an education pipeline whose final gate, the entrance exam, we could not influence. Even our best students were running into a wall designed to admit only the top 1% nationwide, and no amount of foundation-level support was going to change that math.

The first, and often most decisive, step toward a high-paying job in India is earning a quality professional degree — not just a milestone, but the bridge between potential and prosperity. So we asked ourselves: *What if we built that bridge ourselves? What if we reimagined our mission, not as “education first,” but as “high earnings first”?*

That question sparked the creation of Sitare University, India's first completely scholarship-based private university, built exclusively for high-potential, under-resourced students.

Our mission has not changed: we still aim to transform 50,000 lives through education by 2050. But now we are meeting students where they are, and guiding them not through school, but into the workforce as high earners.

Sitare University

Starting in 2022, we chose to focus Sitare University on **Computer Science**, since technology remains the most powerful force for economic uplift in the modern world. By equipping our students with world-class education in this field, we are giving them a fighting chance, not just to catch up, but to leap ahead. The same year, Sitare University welcomed its **first cohort of 24 students**, marking the beginning of an ambitious and transformative journey.

CLASS OF 2026 — THE FIRST COHORT



Sitare University's inaugural class of 24 students, 2022.

Navigating the University Establishment Process

Starting a university in India is no small feat. The regulatory framework is stringent, and rightfully so. Before you can even admit students, you must:

- Acquire a minimum of **25 acres of land**,
- Construct at least **25,000 square feet** of infrastructure, and
- Navigate a web of government approvals and licensing.

Waiting to complete all of this would have delayed our impact by several years. Thankfully, we had a working model from our earlier school program: **rent infrastructure, partner for accreditation, bring your own faculty, and deliver excellence from day one.**

We were fortunate to find an ideal partner in [SRMU, Lucknow](#), which allowed us to register students under their degree program while we provided the full academic experience: our faculty, our curriculum, and our students. Here are the highlights of our progress.

1. We are fortunate to have nine full-time highly qualified faculty, and four teaching assistants.
2. Our curriculum was designed in collaboration with top US universities. We are very proud of our curriculum, it is modern, and it is industry focused. Our students study for three years, and then they spend a year in industry in a co-op program.

3. We doubled the incoming class size for our second batch, Class of 2027. Forty-four students started their college journey in Fall 2023.

CLASS OF 2027 — DOUBLING DOWN



44 students joined our second cohort, Fall 2023.

4. Most of our students do an industry internship after completing their second (sophomore) year. Industry internships are possible due to our large network of founders and VCs who have come together to build Sitare with us.
5. We were expecting to double our class size again for our third class, but we ended up quadrupling it! One hundred and fifty-eight students joined us in Fall 2024 as the Class of 2028.

CLASS OF 2028 — QUADRUPLED



158 students joined our third cohort, Fall 2024.

6. As we were admitting the Class of 2029, our partner could not offer us enough infrastructure to admit a large class so had to cut back the admissions to only one Section of 65 students. This issue is now addressed.

CLASS OF 2029 — A MEASURED STEP



65 students joined our fourth cohort, after infrastructure constraints were addressed.

7. We are in the midst of our admission season for the Class of 2030.

Building Our Own Campus

In parallel to running our program at SRMU, we have made real progress on building our own campus. After a lengthy (almost two years) land acquisition process, which involved numerous skirmishes with local politicians and other obstructors, we were able to purchase and secure forty two acres of land near Indore, Madhya Pradesh.

We then applied for a preliminary license needed to start the building process with the Madhya Pradesh state government, and thanks to the progressive administration of the state, *we were granted the preliminary license on April 8, 2025!*

In parallel to running the licensing process, we started the architectural process by hiring [Rahul Mehrotra's RMA Associates](#) for our project. We have a masterplan for the site, and as we write this, we are submitting our masterplan for building department approvals. We plan on breaking ground later in 2026, and expect a two year build process followed by the final university license process.

OUR FUTURE HOME — INDORE, MP



Sitare University masterplan by RMA Architects — 42 acres, ground-breaking 2026.

THE CAMPUS, IN NUMBERS

42

acres of land secured near
Indore

2025

Preliminary university license granted,
April 8

2028

Target year for campus
completion

Results

After years of disappointing outcomes in our school program, the university results have been a different story, and we want to be careful to present them with the same honesty we brought to our failures.

Our first cohort, 23 remaining of the initial 24, just graduated. We held our first ever commencement on April 26, 2026 in Lucknow. Our graduates spoke from their heart of the transformation in their lives. Several families of our graduating class witnessed the ceremony, and yes, there were tears of joy all around.

APRIL 26, 2026 — COMMENCEMENT



Our first graduating class — 23 of the initial 24, Lucknow.

Even more heartening than the beautiful graduation ceremony is the fact that we had a very successful placement season for our first graduating class. By the numbers:

CLASS OF 2026 — FIRST GRADUATING COHORT

95%

placed (22 of 23)

₹53 L

Max salary

₹10.57 L

Average salary

₹10 L

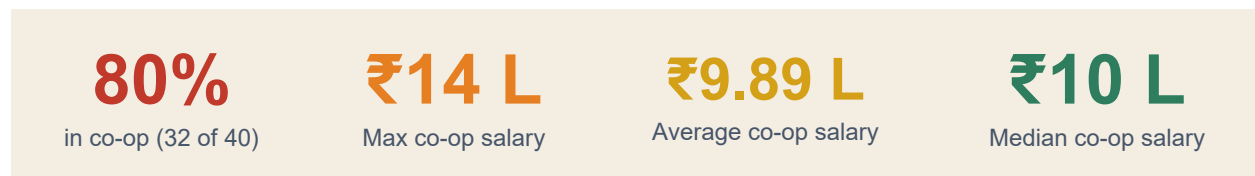
Median salary

- 95% of our students have been placed (22 out of 23)
- Max salary: INR 53,00,000 (53 Lakh, the Indian way of writing money)

- Average salary: INR 10,57,273 (10.57 Lakh)
- Median salary: INR 10,00,000 (10 Lakh)
- **12.4x average upliftment in family income**, a metric we are especially proud of! Our students come from families that on average make ₹85,000 annually.

Our second cohort, 40 who are still enrolled from the initial 44, just completed their co-op placements:

CLASS OF 2027 — CO-OP PLACEMENTS



- 80% of our students have secured a co-op position (32 out of 40)
- Max co-op salary: INR 14,00,000 (14 Lakh)
- Average co-op salary: INR 9,89,677 (9.89 Lakh)
- Median co-op salary: INR 10,00,000 (10 Lakh)
- **12x average upliftment in family income** based on co-op salaries.

We want to be transparent about what these numbers do and don't mean. The cohorts are small: 23 graduates and 40 second-years. We have not yet placed a class of hundreds, and we have not yet seen our graduates five or ten years into their careers, which is when economic mobility really accelerates. We are also operating in a software job market that is itself undergoing significant disruption from AI.

What we can say with confidence is this:

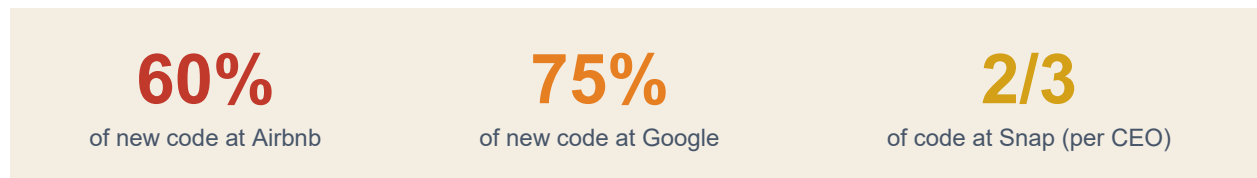
Students whose families earned ₹85,000 a year are now earning ten to sixty times that. That is the mission made concrete, for the first time in a decade of work.

The model is working at our current scale. The harder question, whether it can hold as we scale toward 50,000, is one we are now squarely focused on.

The Question We Cannot Ignore: AI and the Future of Jobs

We would be writing an incomplete letter if we didn't address the largest uncertainty now hanging over everything we've built. In 2026, AI has moved from a background topic to a foreground reality in software development. Airbnb reports that AI now writes 60% of its new code. Google says 75% of its new code is AI-generated. Snap's CEO credits AI for two-thirds of the company's code.

AI-GENERATED CODE IN 2026



This is the present reality our graduating students are walking into, not a distant threat. No one knows exactly where AI goes from here, but the answer is not to hedge; it is to adapt ahead of the curve. The role of a software professional is shifting from create to critique to architect at scale. We still teach arithmetic not because students will do it by hand, but because they need the principles to reason about larger systems. Foundational coding knowledge matters for the same reason, even as AI does more of the line-by-line work. This belief has reshaped our curriculum into four stages:

Year 1 Create	Students write software line by line. They build the mental models that will let them evaluate and direct AI systems later. You cannot critique what you don't understand.
Year 2 Critique	Students work alongside AI. They learn to prompt, evaluate, challenge, and refactor AI-generated code. The skill being built is judgment, not just execution.
Year 3 Build	Students take on a 20-credit, two-semester project to build a large-scale system with real users. AI is a tool in their hands, not a replacement for their thinking.
Year 4 Co-op	A co-op is a paid, year-long industry placement that counts toward the degree. Students spend a full year in industry, where the real test happens.

We are watching the job market carefully. The data so far is genuinely mixed: overall software employment projections remain positive, but entry-level hiring has declined sharply, and young developers are bearing the brunt of current disruption. Our students will graduate into that reality. We think the best thing we can do is ensure they are the professionals who employers compete to hire: people who understand systems deeply, use AI fluently, and can exercise the judgment that AI cannot.

Ten Years On

We came in with the belief that intellect plus opportunity would be enough. The decade taught us that the system itself was the barrier, not our students' potential. Sitare University is our answer to that lesson, built directly from a decade of evidence about where the existing system breaks down for underprivileged students, and where a determined intervention can actually change an outcome.

Twenty-two young people from families who earned ₹85,000 a year are now earning ten to sixty times that. Forty more are on their way through co-op placements. Hundreds behind them are preparing to follow. And in 2026, we plan to admit the largest class in our history, looking forward to a campus we will soon break ground on, with a curriculum we have already begun reshaping for an AI-defined future.

What's next?

Over the next five years, our focus is on three things. First, scaling Sitare University responsibly. We will move into our own 42-acre campus near Indore in 2028, and grow incoming class sizes as infrastructure allows, without compromising the academic standard that has made the model work. Second, deepening our curriculum for an AI-transformed software industry, so our graduates are the professionals companies compete to hire, not the ones being displaced. Third, continuing to refine every part of the model, admissions, curriculum, co-op placements, mentorship, based on what each new cohort teaches us.

What we are still figuring out.

The university model works at our current scale. We do not yet know whether it scales tenfold or a hundredfold while preserving the academic rigor and the personal involvement that have defined it so far. We do not yet know what the software job market will look like when our Class of 2030 graduates. We are honest about these uncertainties because the same honesty about our school program is what allowed us to build the university in the first place.

How can you help?

As a gift to the students it serves and to the country we so dearly love, we have committed enough to run this university. What we do need is partnership of a different kind. Industry leaders who can offer co-op placements, mentorship, and the first real-world opportunity for our students. Teachers and engineers who can join our faculty or contribute to our curriculum as we reshape it for the AI era. And anyone who knows a brilliant, under-resourced student who deserves a shot at this education, we want to hear from you.

You can reach us directly at shilpa@sitare.org and amit@sitare.org. Every email gets read. Every conversation matters.

Ten years ago, we set out to transform 50,000 lives. We are not there yet. But for the first time, we can see the path, and we know what it will take to walk it.

With gratitude,

Shilpa and Amit Singhal

May 20, 2026