

A study on "Residential Bridge Course Camps (RBCs)"

Enabling a conducive environment for deprived children to get access to education.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MVF	Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation
RBC	Residential Bridge Course Camps
MNC	Multi-National Companies
SMC	School Management Committee
CWC	Children Welfare Committee
SHG	Self-Help Groups
CRPF	Child Rights Protection Forum
PIL	Public Interest Litigation

1. INTRODUCTION

This report contains details about my field work experiences and my theme of study on Residential Bridge Course camps. This document totally related to how the issue of child labour is a problem towards achieving the goal of universal elementary education. It contains four different sections identifiable as the background of my field work, the theme of study, policy analysis and interventions required, and critical reflections and learning outcomes from the field.

In the background part, I tried to explain the locations of field visits, existing conditions of that geography, provide a different set of reasons for the existence of child labour in those locations, my observations, etc. In the second section, I tried to explain the need of special training to implement the Right to Education Act, 2009. The gap between the legislative provisions and the actual conditions existing on grass root level. The situation of child labour and children education in context of India. The MVF intervention of filling that gap and how this model have potential for replicating in others locations. More details about the functioning of RBCs and children follow-up after going out from the RBC.

In the last two sections, I discussed the existing policy and noted its loopholes, its problems at the implementation level, and the need for policy interventions. My field work learning outcomes, the changes in my perception regarding child labour, the education of deprived children, the motivational levels in government teachers, the availability of educational facilities in remote villages. Finally, I concluded with some of my explanations and suggestions.

2. BACKGROUND

Our field work was under Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation (MVF), which works for the cause of “eradication of child labour through the universalization of education” through the promotion of full-time, formal education. This foundation focuses more on an area-based approach, community-driven initiations, decentralized planning, strengthening of the existing government institutions, instead of running parallel institutions. The central principle of MVF is “any child out of school is a child labour”. The MVF programme is guided by a Charter of

Basic Principles consisting of five so called “non-negotiables” as follows

- All children must attend full-time formal day schools
- Any child out of school is a child labour
- All work/labour is hazardous; it harms the overall growth and development of child
- There must be a total abolition of child labour
- Any justification perpetuating the existence of child labour must be condemned

As a part of the field work, in Telangana state, we covered two of the presently active locations where MVF has a presence – the city of Hyderabad and a nearby district, Mahabubnagar.

2.1. List of Places Visited

- a. RBC Girls Camp in Chandrayangutta, Hyderabad
- b. Singareni Colony (Slum area) in Saidabad Mandal, Hyderabad
- c. RBC Girl Camp in Achampet Town, Mahabubnagar
- d. Laxmapoor B.K, Amrabad Village in Amrabad Mandal, Mahabubnagar
- e. RBC Girls Camp in Ieeza Town, Mahabubnagar
- f. Uppala village in Ieeza Mandal, Mahabubnagar
- g. Chintakunta, Nandinne villages in Gattu Mandal, Mahabubnagar

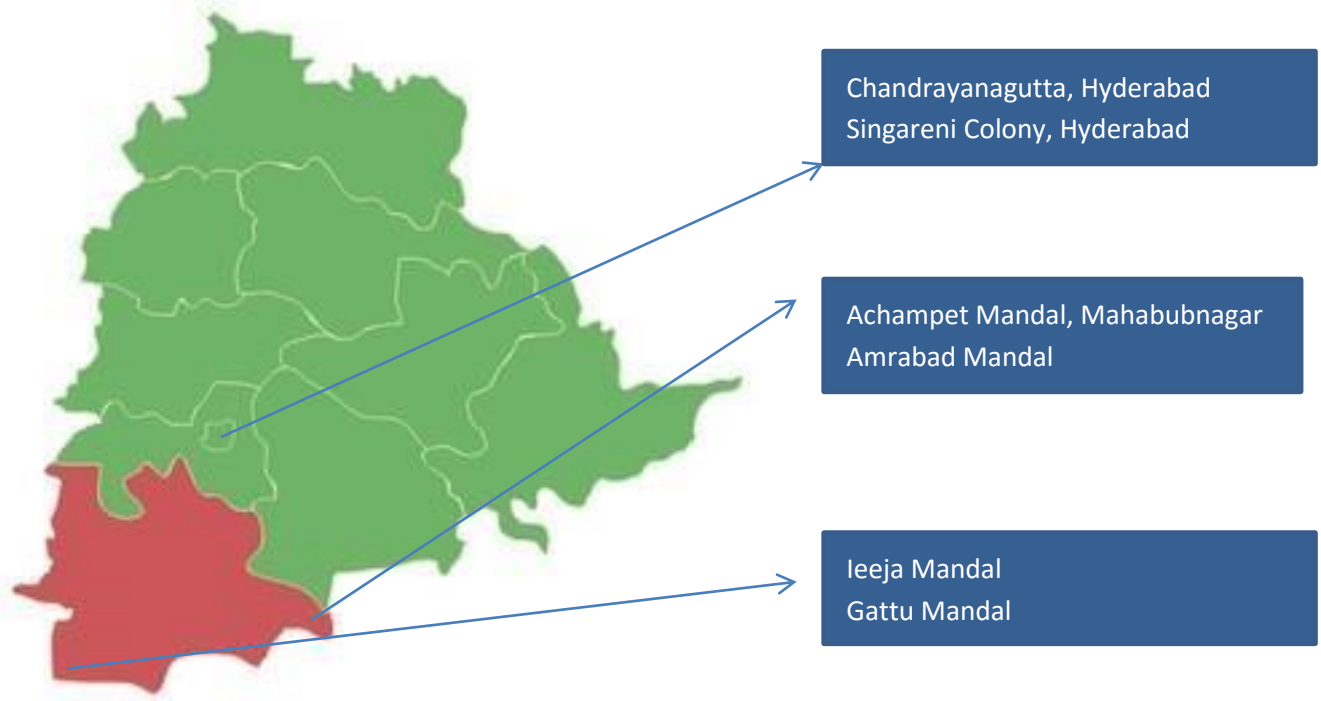


Figure.1

We started our field work by visiting a girls' residential school which are more appropriately termed as "Residential Bridge Course Camps". One of these camps were located in the area called 'Chandrayangutta', in the old city region of Hyderabad. These schools are run by MVF to give special training to the children who were earlier school dropouts or used to work as child labourers. After these children received training and got enough knowledge, they were to join the class, according to their age group. Here, we were having a discussion with children from different backgrounds (See Appendices II). The next day we conducted a door to door survey by accompanying the MVF volunteers in a slum called "Singareni" in Saidabad Mandal of Hyderabad City, where there were no basic facilities like drinking water, sanitation, drainage system and roads. This area is inhabited by approximately 400 migrant families from the backward district of Mahabubnagar. Most of the families belong to ST category, some belong to SC category, and a few belong to the OBC category. They all reached here in search of better livelihoods. Here they have jobs as auto or car drivers, daily wage labourers, construction labourers, and municipality workers. The main objective of the survey is to identifying the causes of child labour and the reasons for students dropping out. On one day of the survey, we covered 200 families, out of which we found 20 children to be out of

school. Even though these families earn less income daily, there are still some families who know the importance of education and send their children to private English medium schools, while others prefer to send their children to government schools (both English and Telugu medium). During the survey, we came across some students who are studying Engineering, Management and also pursuing their bachelors' degrees in Ayurveda. Most of these children are first generation, school-going children.

Table 1

Community	No of families	Literate Parents	No of Child Labour
ST	120	4	15
SC	60	2	4
OBC	15	4	1

The next five days of our field trip was primarily reserved to two different locations within Mahabubnagar district. This district, is regarded as being one of the most backward districts in India, according to a report published by the Ministry of Rural Development. It is a drought prone area of Telangana. Due to this, the majority of people migrate to other nearby towns and cities like Hyderabad, Raichur and Kurnool. In the first half of this field visit, we visited Achampet and Amrabad mandals. Both of these locations are on the border with Nalgonda District of Telangana in north, and Guntur and Ongole districts of Andhra Pradesh in the east and south respectively. These mandals are situated in the foothills of Nallamalla Forest and also Amrabad is India's largest tiger reserve. Achampet consist mostly of plains, while Amrabad has more hilly terrain in the forest. We visited the girls RBC camp in Achampet town where children belong to poor communities from both mandals. After that, we visited a remote tribal village called "Laxmapoor B.K", where we interacted with Lambadi and Chenchu communities, both scheduled tribes. Here we had discussions with rescued children, their parents and one ward member at the village. We, then headed to Amrabad village where we met the SMC Chairman of an Urdu Medium School, a priest who stopped many child marriages by becoming an active member in the "No Child Marriage" campaign. We also met the CWC member from Mahabubnagar district.

The second half of our visit was restricted to Ieeza and Gattu mandals, which were on the border with Karnataka from the west, and with Andhra Pradesh in the south. These two remotely located mandals receive very minimal rainfall. Due to these mandals being located on

the border, it was neglected by the state government. According to the 2011 census, Gattu mandal had the lowest literacy rate at 29%, making it almost equal to the literacy rate in Afghanistan. The poverty and illiteracy conditions in these mandals became an opportunity for MNCs to flourish in their business of cottonseed production. These companies having a larger network of mediators for encouraging the farmers of this area were able to cultivate cottonseed and increase cottonseed production varieties by giving pre-conditioned loans. Most of the times it led to the crop failures and farmers being caught in the debt cycle. This cotton seed production crop cultivation needed more man power for the stage called “cross pollination” in cotton plants. For this purpose, most of the children were employed as labour under the belief that they would do more productive work compared to the adults. Most of the children were enrolled in the schools but they continued to work throughout the whole year. In this location, we visited three villages Uppala, Chintakunta, and Nandinne. In Uppala village, we met different stakeholders in relation to child labour and education like Sarpanch of Panchayat, the School SMC chairman, an adolescent girls group - Kishore Balikala Sangham. Women from village SHGs, CRPF volunteers, Youth organization volunteers, MVF local village mobilizers, students, and parents. In Chintakunta, we met with village Sarpanch officials, and other stakeholders, where they showed their activism by writing letters to the High Court of Telangana about the issue of teachers’ vacancies in the schools of Gattu mandal. The High Court responded to this by taking issuing a PIL and ordered the state government to make a temporary arrangement of teachers in respective schools. In the village of Nandinne, we met with CRPF youth volunteers and the Panchayat secretary where they played very important role in dealing with the issue of child labour and child marriages. It was decided to mainstream the children into the regular schools with support by MVF. Lastly, we met with the Mandal Education Officer of Ieeza Mandal, and also with teachers from different schools where we discussed the issues related to education, like motivation levels of teachers, incentives to work in rural areas, issue of teacher transfers, the quality of education, guaranteeing of basic infrastructural facilities, the increase in teacher vacancies, single teacher schools, and hiring of temporary academic instructors, etc.

3. ROLE OF RBCs IN BRINGING THE SCHOOLS IN REACH DEPRIVED CHILDREN

3.1. Context of Education and Child labour in India

According to the 2001 Census, there were approximately 253 million children in India between the ages of 5 and 14 years. Of these children, the official estimates of non-school going children is 65 million. Out of these, 12 million are formally considered to be child labourers by the government of India, while the remaining 53 million children – the majority of whom are girls, are not in school and are not officially considered to be engaged in labour. These children are often referred to in the literature as “nowhere children” as they do not appear in labour statistics and schools. Most of these children work to supplement family income by performing domestic chores or working on family farms. There is a big dilemma in India about the definition of child and child labour because there is no uniformity in different pieces of legislation like the Child Labour Act, the Child Marriage Act and the Juvenile Justice Act. Article 24 of India's Constitution prohibits hazardous child labour. The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 prohibits the employment of children below the age of 14 years in hazardous occupations. There is no clarity about other children who are employed in non-hazardous occupations. The compromising tendency of the government supporting the non-formal mode of education for these children is evident by them agreeing to the poverty argument from the family side. Even the new policy on education was devised only in 1985, and still accepted the rationale of poverty argument and sought to achieve the universalization of elementary education through the extension of non-formal education. By the 86th Constitutional Amendment Bill of 2001, the Indian government formally recognized the “free and compulsory education up to elementary level (8th class) as a fundamental right of all Indian children. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009 mandates free and compulsory education to all children aged 6 to 14 years. This legislation also mandated that 25 percent of the seats in every private school must be allocated for children from disadvantaged groups and physically challenged children. The government succeeded to achieve the highest enrolment rates by those who failed in practical implementation of giving access to education to those in the age group of 8 to 14 years. Under this act, there are some important provisions like special trainings for children never enrolled and dropout children to joined classes according to their age group, school management committee, maintenance of

records by local government for the age group of 6-14 children. This special training phase for mainstreaming the children is playing a very important role here.

3.2. Why RBC?

The main objective of an RBC is to make the children capable to join classes in regular schools according to their age group. The reasons for child labour may be economic conditions of the family, unawareness about the benefit of education, a lack of information about government facilities (like school, hostels, reservation, complicated admission process and transfer of schools) which inclined parents to send children to work. Each child labourer and dropout student had a unique story in their context. To overcome this situation and make them habituated to the formal education system, it remained a challenging task. Teachers from government schools needed extensive training regarding how to deal with the different backgrounds students came from because sometimes the background of the teacher also played a very important role.

3.3. What is RBC?

- The RBC Camps are complete residential schools to run by the MVF which provide the special training for mainstreaming the child labour and dropout children.
- The residential bridge course serves the purpose of helping in their transition from workers to students.
- It serves to prepare children who have been withdrawn from work to join schools into classes according to their age.
- It prepares parents in the meantime to accept a situation where their children are no longer available for work. In other words during this time parents are prepared to make all relevant adjustments within the family to cope with the altered situation.
- It prepares schools/Ashram Schools, to accept older children. These institutions are thus prepared to work out modalities for responding to the needs of the first generation learners.
- It prepares the local bodies to monitor and review the functioning of schools especially with regard to the status of dropouts and children who have never been enrolled in schools.
- It serves as centres for mobilization and as a resource centre. In a way the residential bridge course camps are important components of social mobilization.

Stakeholders such as schoolteachers, officials of the education department and all other departments who deal with children and child labour visit the camps the objectives of the programme of bridge course therefore, is to provide bridge not only for children but also for the parents, schoolteachers, community and the gram Panchayats.

The bridge course camps thus serve the purpose of establishing links with the community and helping them understand the possibilities of bringing older children back to school.

3.4. Detailed Functioning of RBC

Bringing children to an RBC is a major challenge. After an initial survey was conducted, we received a clearer picture of the area about how many dropouts, child labour, bonded labour are there, and what are the reasons for these issue. Then the MVF mobilisation volunteers who were recruited from those villages played a very important role in convincing the parents, landlords, employers, to release the child from the work, and to win the confidence among the community. For this purpose to be achieved, the MVF volunteers' formed a committee recognized as CRPF formed of active persons from the community. These CRPF members also participated in the social mobilisation phase through which everyone in the society express outrage that being out of the school system children are being exploited. They also the children confident and hope to abandon work and join schools once there is a public debate and discussion on their right to education.

3.5. Adjustment Phase and Initial Activities

For an RBC, there are no particular admission dates for joining the course. Every time some new children expressed intent to join and some children go out for joining the regular schools for the main streaming purpose. The duration of the camp depended on the child's own pace of learning. Generally the camp duration varied from 6-18 months and sometimes less than this. Just after the children joint, they would go for the adjustment phase conducted during the 15-20 month span in which there was a dedicated teacher assigned to look after them. The teachers also recruited in such a manner who also participated in the initial survey and motivational camp, so that they can know the ground level reality. In this phase the teachers will collect the all detailed information about the child like parents background, earlier work by knowing this type of information they can be better approached by different strategy for different students. In this phase they make the children feel comfortable and wanted and giving them a sense of

ownership of the camp. Since most of the children in the camp belonged to older age groups, there needed to be efforts to better integrate them into the camp's atmosphere. The usual method of transitioning such children was accomplished by teachers talking to them and establishing a rapport through individual counselling as well as group discussions. The emphasis is on drawing strength from each other with spirit of co-operation. Many group dynamics through songs, games and cultural items facilitate such a spirit of togetherness and also enhancing their sense of belonging in the camp.

3.6. Groups in RBC unlike Regular Classes

A child's learning levels are assessed and grouped accordingly. On the basis of the performance of the children they are categorized into A, B, C, D, and E group.

- A group - those who were never enrolled and had no schooling
- B group - those who can read and write up to class-1 standard
- C group - those who have 2nd class standard □ D group - those who have 3rd and 4th class standard
- E group - those who are 5th class standard and above.

There must also be a special group for older children who are 14 years of age especially if there are at least 7-8 children in the camp of that age group.

3.7. Camp Teaching and learning

At the time of teaching children to read and write, MVF teachers make use of material derived from the children's own experience - stories, poems, riddles, rhymes, etc. This is less alienating and the children engage with the material on equal terms as they themselves have been part of creating the texts. These texts are then used for exercises on content and grammar e.g. questions on main points of information, completing sentences, etc. This familiar material offers the children the opportunity to work within a comfort zone, which again encourages participation and promotes learning. After completion of these basic texts, the teachers follow the regular texts. Teachers' reviews are held every second day at 9.30 p.m. This gave us an opportunity to discuss with peers and give to take advice on matters relating to discipline, lack of progress by students, and so on. Many strategies evolved from this group discussions (e.g. giving some responsibility for the child who is not paying attention).

3.8. Participation of children in camp

In general, the body of children must also be provided with a forum to discuss the happenings in the classroom, share their triumphs and difficulties with fellow students, and give a feed back to teachers on how they liked or disliked the classes and so on. Thus once children are comfortable they participate in the functioning of the camp. They are divided into committees to take up the responsibility of mess, material, health, water, recreation and cleanliness. In the initial phase, there is also a need for security committee to find out about those boys/girls who are not able to adjust in the camp and may be planning to leave surreptitiously. Almost every child is a member of one committee or other. Their responsibilities are shifted by rotation.

4. AFTER RBCs

4.1. Main streaming

Once the children are ready and confident to join the local schools, the education department must provide maximum support to mainstream these children. There has to be a road map where these children are to go and preparation of the child and his/her family must take place. The school, too, has to be prepared to welcome such children openly and make all arrangements to respect them. Normally, schools are apprehensive about the quality of learning needed for such children and also whether these children are capable of satisfying the strenuous conditions. It is necessary for the schoolteacher to be primed to accept such children with a sense of pride and responsibility and feel obliged to take them without insisting on quality. They must realize that the child's journey to the school has been long and arduous and this itself is a measure of great quality. It is the responsibility of school to give all additional support to enable these children to catch up with their peers.

4.2. Follow-up

After the enrolment of the camp children in the schools and hostels, MV Foundation provides a support person from among the organizers' and teachers to help the children to adjust children to their new circumstances. The interaction with these children and their history enables them to provide:

- care
- help with homework and tuition

- advice on personal problems
- advocacy on their behalf with the authorities
- act as a liaison with families

These support persons are not teachers and should be available for their own vital work at all times. (See Appendix I)

5. POLICY ANALYSIS AND NECESSARY INTERVENTIONS

The pieces of legislation that have long existed to protect children in India have been largely ineffective, or at least insufficient, as evidenced by the sheer number estimated to be out of school, or engaged in some form of employment. The reasons for the failure of these legislations are twofold.

Firstly, in a country of India's vast size, much of population dwell in remote rural areas with poor infrastructure, ensuring effective implementation, enforcement of laws and policies is difficult.

Secondly, many of the policies and legislative tools are deeply flawed, allowing for contravention through the exploitation of loopholes.

The Child labour Act gave rise to the National Child Labour Policy (NCLP) in 1987, which sought to tackle the social and economic conditions influencing child labour through “the establishment of special schools to provide non-formal education and pre-vocational skills training; to promoting additional income and employment generation opportunities; raising public awareness, and conducting surveys and evaluation of child labour. However, the NCLP approach of non-formal education as a supplement to child labour and a substitute for formal full-time education became a more plausible reason for failure in achieving their objective. Why should only the poor go for vocational training? Why not rich children? Government policy should be inductive in nature giving a chance to every child in India to pursue the course in which they are interested.

The new Policy on Education (NPE) which was devised in 1985, acknowledges the failings of past policies; it still accepted the rationale of poverty argument and sought to achieve the universalization of elementary education through the extension of non-formal education. Both the “poverty argument” and the concept of the irrelevance of education have played major roles in the formulation of government programs relating to child labour and education. This

meant that the Indian government indirectly allowed child labour to take precedence over education.

The situation at the ground level is totally different, as there is no rationale for the poverty argument and also, where every parent has a dream to send his/her children to school against all odds. Due to this reason, the complicated issues which impact the lives of millions of children should be instituted through a bottom-up approach. Even though education in concurrent lists the above, respective governments should also have context to the specific models to deal with the child labour issue in different geographies instead of going by 'one type of system fits all' approach.

6. CRITICAL REFLECTIONS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES FROM FIELD TRIP

My entire fieldwork was a long journey of learning. During this journey, I had the chance to meet different stakeholders from various communities in the field of education. I learnt that child labour, child marriage and education have direct relations to each other. Before I started my field work, my perceptions on these issues were a little bit hazy. I came to appreciate the fact that even though children earned in case of child labour, it is an additive to family income, parents were still prone to spending their earnings on children rather than they contribute to the family. The poverty argument, in the issue of child labour is not that important because every parent has a dream of getting their children educated. They are ready to face the poverty; they are ready to undertake all sacrifices for their children to receive a well-rounded education. If child labour is removed, then adults will replace the children in their positions and will be able to get more decent wages as compared to the earlier situation. The assumption of children as cheap labour is a social evil. If there is proper awareness in the society, even the employers will fear employing children as labour. Along with legislation, we need active and continuous social transformations which will be demonstrated through community-driven change.

I observed a situation where a father of a child is able to afford a motorcycle, but is unaware of the benefits of education for girl child. This is totally an opposite condition to which I mentioned earlier. Day by day the people's standard of living increases. However, by increasing their standard of thinking is being related to some neglected issues which remain the same. They never feel that the girl child should have access to an equal and proper education, as those of the opposite gender.

In the case of government teachers, my initial assumption is that their motivational levels are very low, and thus they are not interested in teaching the poor students. However, after I met a teacher in Gattu mandal who runs a single-teacher school with a capacity of 330 students. He also gets support from his juniors who are preparing to become government teachers. I realized that some people are very much interested to uplift their locality from the conditions of illiteracy. Government teachers have adequate motivational levels but they need proper training according to changes seen in the field of education. In addition, they need a proper checks and balances system. Along with this, they need to reverse treatment unlike the earlier system of salary incentives (like teachers posted in urban area will get more allowance compared to who posted in rural areas).

In case of providing special training to dropout students, child labour which was mentioned in Right to Education Act, 2009, the teachers themselves need to have better and revised training as part of their academic studies. In case of implementing the other provision of same act, like creation of school management committees and the maintenance of data for children aged between 6 to 14 years. We need proper awareness among the people regarding the legislation or community participation and community opinion before making the legislation.

APPENDICES-I

Details of boys and girls who visited and secured admission in the Hostels and KGBVs								
S.No	Mandal	Hostels/ KGBVs visited	Date	B	G	T	Hostel Admissions	KGBV Admissions
1	Bandlaguda	2	19 th - Rajendranagar, 21 st - Ibrahimpattam KGBV	7	19	26	7 Boys to Rajendranagar Boys Hostel and 13 girls to Rajendranagar Girls Hostel	6 girls to KGBV Ibrahimpattam and
2	Saidabad	3	16th and 22nd to Rajendranagar, Mehdipattam and Hayatnagar	8	1	9	4 Boys and 1 Girl to Rajendranagar, 1 Boy to Mehdipattam, 3 Boys to Hayatnagar	-
3	Secunderabad	2	1 st May to Don Bosco and Banjara Urdu girls hostel	1	2	3	1 boy to Don Bosco and 2 girls to Banjara Urdu hostel	
4	Maredpally	1	22nd - Hayatnagar	1	1	2	1 Boy to Hayatnagar	
5	Musheerabad	1	29th – Yousufguda	2	-	2	2 Boys to Yousufguda Hostel	-
6	Saroornagar	-	-	-	-	-	-	
	Total	9		19	23	42	22 (+ 1 boy to local school)	19

APPENDICES-II

Case Study of Student from Chandrayangutta RBC, Hyderabad

NAME: ARCHANA SEX: FEMALE

DOB: 13 – 08 - 2003

AGE: 12 YEARS OLD

STATE: TELANGANA

CITY: HYDERABAD

RESIDENCE: KHAIRTABAD, NEAR IMAX THEATRE

FATHER: LATE. JANGAIAH

MOTHER: LATE. ANITHA

SIBLINGS: ONE ELDER BROTHER, ONE ELDER SISTER



FACTS OF THE REPORT

I posed questions to Archana such as: tell us about yourself, your family details, how did you come here, did you do any job for daily wages as child labour, who is the person brought to MVF, education details, where did you worked for how much salary, did have any interested in education, now how did you feel in MVF, are you studying now. According to Archana, she revealed the facts as follows:

As per the case of Archana, when I was the small kid my father died but I didn't know how my father died. Nobody revealed to me the death of my father. When I reached the age of eight years, my mother also died due to low blood pressure. During the ages of 7 and 8 years, I am able to remember only my mother during the time in which she was alive. My mother married again to a person, by the name of, Nagaraju. As the second marriage occurred, after my father died there were no children between my mother and Nagaraju, and soon after he also died. My mother used to take a loan and did some business through a cigarette and gutkha shop. The business ended up in loss, so after repeating many times in the same manner, she used to drink madras Quarter (which is alcohol). Since then, she has become addicted to alcohol. Due to this, my mother grew mentally and physically disturbed, and later died. My elder brother used to work in a wine shop as a daily wage labourer for Rs. 100/-, and my elder sister used to

work in a mess hall. After my father died, my mother had a second marriage to Nagaraju, who became my stepfather. When he was alive he used to send me to the Vasavi School near Meera Talkies. I studied up to the 3rd standard. After my mother and stepfather's deaths', my education stopped due to financial and family problems. At the age of eight, I started working as a sweeper in front of a wine shop earning a daily wage of Rs. 50/- per day, after my mother and stepfather's deaths. My mother's elder sister, Bhagya, and her younger brother, Manoj, took us to their house. Bhagya's husband, Mallesh, and Manoj used to scold us in un-parliamentary languages and beat me hard with whatever they had in their hand. They made me work in Mirchi Bandis on the road side at Medan chowrastha for one year as daily wage labour earning Rs. 50/-. I, soon, left that work and we moved to native house at Khairatabad. One person namely, Azam who lives behind my house gave me Rs.50/- one day and asked me to purchase a bouquet of roses from Monda market, a flower market, and to sell each flower for Rs.20/-. I used to bring flowers from Monda market and sell them daily. My income from this was Rs.400/-. My brother now works in a general kirana store, and my sister is working in hospital earning a monthly salary.

When I am studying I lose interest in education, due to frequent disturbances in my family and thus started working. One day, I was seen selling roses, when one policeman asked me whether I liked studying. I immediately said 'yes', after which the police officer took me and handed me over to MVF volunteers. I came here in the month of July, 2013. After coming to this foundation I feel great happy and now I am studying in C – Group. I thank MVF.