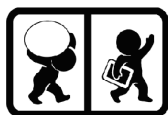


# Why Education?

**Analyzing the Benefits for  
Former Child Laborers**

**David Ledet**

**5 August 2005**



**MV FOUNDATION**

201/202 Narayan Apartments

Sri Hanumanji Cooperative Housing Society

Marredpally West, Secunderabad 500 026, Andhra Pradesh, India

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# **Why Education? Analyzing the Benefits for Former Child Laborers**

*by*

**David Ledet**

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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

The initial design for the project was a result of questions that arose after visiting MV Foundation bridge camps in Nalgonda, Ranga Reddy, and Adilabad Districts. Throughout the case studies of villages, gram panchayats, teachers, youth groups, families, and bridge camps, there seemed to be a glaring omission from each of the talks: how does education benefit these children?

Of course, the reasons for the omission were multifold. The most basic reason is that, although the MV Foundation has been in operation since 1991, the majority of the children put through bridge camps have yet to reach working age. Many of the children who joined the program in its initial years were young children between the ages of six and eight, which now, if one does the math, puts them at around 21-23. As of now, many of these students are still pursuing their intermediate and degree college education.

Additionally, MV Foundation began in just one district and mainstreamed 190 children into formal schools its first year, the low number making it more difficult to keep in touch, especially fifteen years later.

The MV Foundation bridge camp volunteers, teachers, and coordinators speak of improved mobility in and out of an agricultural industry prone to droughts and job loss, of learning for the sake of knowledge and the satisfaction of acquiring new knowledge.

But the parents of the children and most members of the community are completely illiterate, with only a privileged few knowing the most rudimentary skills of reading and writing, how can they elaborate on the topic?

Another significant reason is that many benefits of an education are essentially intangible, an aspect that makes this project both more meaningful and difficult. The results are not quantifiable; there are few ways to express the benefits of education for these children except in

opposition to the alternatives. Of course, the few ways in which it is possible to express these benefits, though somewhat subjective, are far from negligible. They include, among others, increased confidence levels in children, the presence of a substantive childhood, setting an example for their brothers and sisters as well as other children in the village, a sense of pride for both the children and their family, and a sense of morality coupled with the ability to pursue their convictions.

This report engages questions and connections of considerable contention, such as typical justifications for child labor, governmental policies and their impact on child labor, MV Foundation's strategy for the eradication of child labor and universalisation of education, as well as benefits of a formal education. The successes of students, their failures, and their responses to the improvements and adversity in their lives form the focus of the report and will be interjected throughout with supporting evidence.

## 2

## TYPICAL JUSTIFICATIONS FOR CHILD LABOR

Perhaps the most debatable, highly contested, and discourse-stemming aspect of any conversation concerning child labor or education is the classic “Poverty Argument.” At the core of both proponents and opponents of any approach to child labor, one will find the “Poverty Argument” sitting at attention and ready to be employed. It is not difficult to see why. The argument relies purely on ostensibly sound logic and asserts that a family living in poverty necessarily requires each and every rupee it can get, even if that means sending their children to work. A vicious cycle is soon created that continues to inhibit attempts to discern to what extent poverty dictates child labor. Government officials and intellectuals, unfamiliar with village life and looking for a way to perpetuate the marginalization of the rural and urban poor, report over and over again that child labor is an inevitable symptom of dire poverty, thus stigmatizing the poor into believing that anyone not living in luxury will be unable to educate their children. Families that subscribe to this untested and generally applied logic, who begin to believe that the excuse is fact, provide the fuel that keeps the argument from dying out.

Before departing for the trip, I remember the words of a few classmates, colleagues, and professionals, particularly those from India: “You are messing with these peoples’ lives. Don’t go over there telling them their children should go to school. They simply cannot afford it. The children will drop out, lose the jobs they had previously, and be forced to resort to illicit occupations such as drug trade and prostitution.” It was not so much the words that were disturbing, although they were, it was the ease with which they were spoken and the degree of finality that was implied. Those adhering to this message felt no need to elaborate and were unwilling to enter any sort of productive discourse.

Further investigation, however, reveals a vast movement for education spreading like wild-fire across Andhra Pradesh, a movement

already beginning to reach beyond the state's borders. The catalysts of this movement include numerous people and organizations, perhaps most notably the MV Foundation, concerned with a serious assessment of child labor rather than simply trying to maintain the status quo. That is not to suggest that they are blind to the consequences of poverty. In a seeming paradox, the idealists seem to have a better grasp of the realities of poverty. As Shantha Sinha articulates:

✚ “It could, of course, be postulated that a critical level of income exists below which all families are compelled, in order to survive, to send their children to work and supplement the family's income. In fact, the Poverty Argument implicitly assumes that all working children belong to such families and hence cannot be withdrawn from work without financial compensation. But what exactly this critical level on income is below which a family is compelled to send the children to work and, whether it is a fact that the particular family under scrutiny does have an income below the critical level is something that has to be established” (Nagarjuna, p 3).

By relegating all families with working children under this critical income level, a convenient excuse is found to justify inaction by the government without serious investigation. All too often one will hear commentary such as that of Faraaz Siddiqi Harry Patrinos from HCO (Human Capital Development and Operations), which claims that “children work for a variety of reasons, the most important being poverty”(2). This statement was recently echoed by the Government of India in a press release claiming that “by far the most important factor contributing to child labor is poverty”(“Restoring Childhood to Working Children”). And yet this assertion lies in the face of the lives and experiences of many in rural Andhra Pradesh, where poverty is an obstacle constantly overcome.

I recently spoke with Mallesh, a twenty-year-old student from Pillaipally village in Nalgonda District, Andhra Pradesh, whose story contradicts even the most convincing arguments for child labor (Case Study 5). By all measures, if poverty governed child labor, he would be working long hours and breaking his back for a few rupees a day. Instead, Mallesh is currently studying at Anandayothi Private College and is in his Intermediate second year.

The odds have always been against him, and yet he has managed



to fight his way through. Initially enrolled in school, his academic career came to an early and seemingly certain end when he was tossed out of school and into the hands of a local landlord, his parents citing a large debt and skepticism about the benefits of his education. Mallesh did various forms of agricultural work as a bonded laborer and spent his afternoons grazing animals. It was not long before he began school again, however, after a simple discussion between MV Foundation and his parents exposed them to an array of advantages to an education that they simply were not aware of.

MV Foundation was also instrumental in helping mobilize the community to protest his bondage, which was subsequently ended. His father passed away during his studies in intermediate, further complicating what was already a difficult situation. His family owns no land and his mother works as an agriculture laborer and sells milk from the two buffaloes they own. The care he takes in preserving the Rs 1750 he makes during his vacations as a tractor laborer indicate that his dream of becoming an accountant is well-aligned with his abilities. This money is enough to carry him through the school year. He should be commended for his effort and for breaking through limiting social stereotypes, but his case should not be seen as an anomaly. Instead, it should be seen as a clear indication that children everywhere are capable of obtaining an education, no matter what government or economic statistics report. At the very least, it renders suspect the government's theory that "his very survival" is at stake by not working (GOI: "Restoring Childhood to Working Children").

Another argument, posed this time by a working paper for the World Bank, tries to provide a rationale for existence of child labor.

- ✱ "We believe that our results show that in the medium run (i.e., over a five to ten-year horizon) there are important economic benefits to child labor that offset its opportunity cost (lower school attainment) for households.
- ✱ However, over a longer horizon the returns to education increase, with more educated individuals experiencing increased wage growth, and the returns to work experience decrease. Thus, our findings provide a rationale for why child labor exists and illustrate the fundamental difficulty in reducing its prevalence" (Beegle, p 32).

This argument might provide a rationale for why child labor exists, a limited one at that, but it also does little to explain how backwards this rationale is. Short-term planning, for a government such as India's or for a village family, is by definition inadequate. It neglects the overall well-being of both the parents and the child and perpetuates the cycle of poverty by ensuring that the knowledge necessary to improve one's condition remains out of reach. In addition to being rationally deficient, their study blatantly neglects a major aspect of education: its legacy. When a child has been educated for the first time in his family, he/ she learns a lesson just as important as those in textbooks. By experiencing education, observing its processes, and familiarizing oneself with its inner workings, an educated child will be immeasurably more prepared to make sure his/ her children are not deprived of their right to learn. Not to mention, it is quite limiting to evaluate something like child labor solely from an economic point of view. Obviously, a child will make more money working than he will in school. That is not the question. What really needs to be asked is whether it is truly necessary for a child to be working and whether or not labor is as beneficial to a child's overall development as education. The answer is a resounding no.

These seemingly self-evident principles must be demonstrated to communities using explanations that refuse to promote child labor. Excuses and ignorance in relation to child labor cannot be allowed to survive if underlying attitudes are to experience a wholesale transformation. Shashi Tharoor recently cited sociologist Mahmood Mamdani's assertion that "people aren't poor because they have too many children; they have too many children because they are poor" (p 293). Mamdani speaks of children as assets to a poor family and as "potential sources of labor," a crude viewpoint that negates any recognition of children's rights, rights that at the very least should ensure children are treated as more than pieces of property. Child labor will persist as long as children are viewed in these terms.

Compulsory education and a shared community belief in the propriety of education can go a long way towards eradicating this utilitarian view of children. Instead of as tools for improving family income, they should be viewed as children, as human beings who rely on their parents for love, compassion, and support. The fact is that child labor supplies a temporary solution to a long-term problem that actually

reinforces and perpetuates the conditions used for its justification. Long-term problems need long-term solutions, and this is exactly what education is.

To elaborate on the critique of Mamdani's assessment of large families in areas of poverty, it should be added that viewing children as family employees is only half the story. In fact, my experience has demonstrated that over ninety-percent of parents who did not initially think education was necessary were themselves completely uneducated. Put simply, "people had children because they didn't know better" (Tharoor, p 293). A cycle where "poverty breeds overpopulation and overpopulation breeds poverty is created," not as a result of needing money but because they simply are not familiar with the alternatives (Tharoor, p 293).

The argument has also been frequently made that children are better equipped at certain tasks than their adult counterparts, and this is used to justify their employment. Recent studies, such as that by Levison et al, have aimed to explore this common presumption in order to ascertain whether this is verified by experience. Kaushik Basu and Zafiris Tzannatos, leading economists in the field of child labor, use these results to lend credence to their use of the substitution axiom, which suggests that children and adults are interchangeable productivity-wise in arenas traditionally considered best suited for children. In the carpet industry, for example, it has been shown that "adults in India are as good if not better in producing hand-knotted carpets as children" (Basu, p 3). So, at the very least, evidence shows that children are not required to perform these tasks, nor do they execute them with any greater proficiency.

And then there are critics who actually decry a lackluster education system and poor facilities as justifications for keeping children out. This is an example of wanting to throw out the baby with the bathwater. While it might be true that India's education system is in dire need of improvement, suggesting that it is understandable for children not to attend on these grounds is ludicrous. Myron Weiner, in his seminal work *The Child and the State in India*, captures everything wrong with the government's attitude and response to this viewpoint. Instead of constructively addressing such criticism's, one high ranking official ponders "what right [the government has] to compel parents to send

children to schools that are not worth much. The teachers aren't any good. Often they don't even appear at school" ( p 57). Understanding the inadequacies of the system and evaluating them as a means to improvement is one thing, but every child in India has a right to expect more from a public official than defeatist statements such as this official's conclusion that "right now our schools are trash!" (Weiner, p 57). But he is right in one respect, it is not a matter of the government having the right to compel parents to send their children to school. It is not a man's right to do a job that he's been paid to do, it is his duty. Lucky for him he was not asked what he thought his job actually entailed.

## GOVERNMENT, CHILD LABOR AND EDUCATION

The government has remained largely complicit in the perpetuation of child labor, refusing to seriously invest in its eradication and justifying its presence by attempting to regulate its practice. In its effort to construct a favorable public image, data has been manipulated and falsified, legislation created without intention while acts are simultaneously passed which undermine even this façade of concern.

A press release issued recently by Information Officer M.L. Dhar on June 14th, 2005, indicates this inconsistency. He states that “India has all along felt that working children must be provided with opportunities to develop into ‘healthy well-rounded personalities’” (Government of India (GOI): “Restoring Childhood to Working Children”). And yet his very next sentence offers a contradiction by suggesting that “a distinction has to be drawn between child labor and its exploitation.” He cites a statement by the M.S. Gurupadaswamy Committee set up by the government of India that says “labour becomes an absolute evil in the case of a child when he is required to work beyond his physical capacity, when hours of employment interfere with his education, recreation and rest, when the wages are not commensurate with the quantum of work done and when the occupation he is engaged in endangers his life and safety.” This constant attempt to allow the maltreatment of children to persist has, as this statement indicates, not improved in the past twenty-five years. It is delusional to think that child labor will not interfere with his/ her education, recreation, and rest. Child workers have no voice when it comes to working conditions or hours, ensuring that employers need not concern themselves with requirements that obstruct the children from education or deprive them of free time.

The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of 1986, which puts into law this distinction between child labor and its exploitation, provides numerous guidelines for the employment of children in line

with the aforementioned reasoning. It also clearly justifies its existence. According to this act's definition, only seven percent of India's child laborers work in "hazardous" industries. So how does this act propose to stop child labor and help bring children to school? Specifically tailored to provide the appearance of action without really having to do anything, this law has been the focus of a recent nation-wide campaign as multiple NGOs and thousands of volunteers have been protesting what is actually an ineffective, unenforced, and ultimately detrimental piece of legislation. Ashok Agarwal<sup>1</sup>, eminent social jurist, has recently filed suit with the Supreme Court highlighting the incongruity of Article 21A in the chapter on fundamental rights of the Indian Constitution, which promulgates free and compulsory education for every child between the ages of six and fourteen, and this Child Labour Act. Agarwal declares that "the distinction between hazardous and non-hazardous work in relation to a child is bogus," and that "the number of child labor is increasing day-by-day in spite of the government's claim to the contrary." He is absolutely right to question how a child can "realize this fundamental right to education if he is simultaneously asked to continue as a child laborer." These children do not work for one or two hours a day after school only if they don't have any homework; if they did it would hardly be as volatile an issue. The exact reason that child labor is so inexcusable is because there is no possible way to reconcile it with proper development of a child. It deprives every child exposed to its drudgery of their childhood.

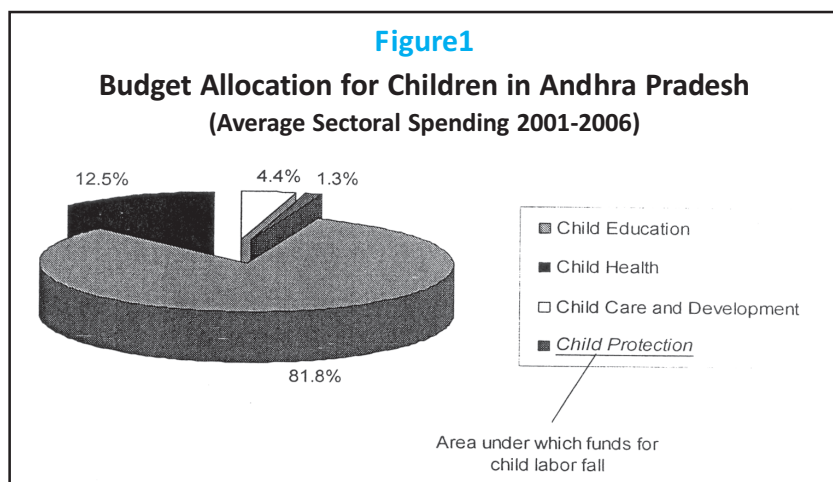
In fact, the Second Labour Commission of the Government of India recognizes this exact dilemma. It states that "the only way to prevent child labour is to recognize that the rightful place of children is in school, not in the work place or in the house," and that "whether the child is employed in enterprises and industries outside the home or at home, for wages or to help in domestic chores or family occupations, it does result in the forfeiture of opportunities for education and for formation" (Agarwal). And so the sprawling bureaucracy that is the Government of India seems to have many faces, a schizophrenic with a mission that is constantly undermined by its other personalities. The problem is that this seems to be specifically geared towards placation and inaction. One day they are realists, the next idealists, constantly backpedaling until

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1 In-house memo, MV Foundation. July 2005.

they bump into the wall only to turn around and start again. The problem with constantly backpedaling, in addition to getting nowhere, is that there is no vision of the road ahead.

One way to gauge the seriousness of its promises is looking at the budget for the child. For instance, children received 12.27% of the state budget on average from 2001- 2005<sup>2</sup>. This percentage combines education, healthcare, child care and development, and child protection. The section responsible for child labor is under child protection, which also covers children in need of adoption, child trafficking, children who are physically or mentally challenged, street children, and children who are neglected or treated as juvenile offenders. As a percentage of the Total Child Budget, child protection receives a lowly 1.3%, translating into an even more depressing 0.14% of the Total State Budget. So essentially there are six subsections of child protection competing for a very small percentage of the overall child budget. When you contrast this with the fact that out of the 17.7 million children in Andhra Pradesh, 37% are out of school (4.7 million), the picture becomes even gloomier. Under the definition of child labor as any child out of school, not only are 37% of all children laborers, but the government spends only 0.167% of 1.3% of the Total Child Budget on their behalf.



2 All information in this paragraph from soon to be published HAQ document by Dolon. Contact MVF for more information.

To depress matters further, it has been estimated “that only 15 percent of governmental expenditure actually reaches the intended target beneficiaries” (Tharoor, p 195). This raises a number of criticisms and has led to speculation that “the real reasons” that the government marginalizes these children is “that there is, if not an actual conspiracy, a set of attitudes among the country’s decision-makers that militate against extending the benefits of education to the ignorant masses” (Tharoor 295). And so the task of eliminating child labor becomes a battle on multiple fronts. On one hand, the attitudes of parents in villages must be altered in order for them to understand the advantages of education, while on the other those in power must be convinced that the traditional marginalization of these individuals must be stopped.

If around fifteen percent of one-sixth of 1.3% of India’s Child Budget actually reaches these children, then adding India’s remarkably high dropout rate only decimates the few rupees that have until now survived. This high dropout rate ensures that “substantial portions of India’s educational expenditures are for children who fail to have enough schooling to achieve functional literacy” (Weiner, p 74). As Weiner explains, “With only 33 percent to 40 percent of those who enroll in the first standard completing four years of school, the costs of producing a literate child are substantially higher than if the school system was able to retain all of the children” (p 74). Therefore, groups dedicated to monitoring children in order to increase retention are playing a large role in making governmental spending more efficient. By checking up on children after school and observing attendance records, groups such as the MV Foundation are helping to maximize returns while simultaneously providing an invaluable service to India’s rural and urban poor.

All of this points out that much more can and should be done by the government to help end child labor. It is within this context of gross mismanagement that statistics lauding the government’s increased spending on education should be viewed. Recently, the IMF featured an article called “The Quiet Revolution” in their quarterly magazine *Finance and Development*, an article that is subtitled “How India is achieving universal elementary education.” The authors are so intent on being amazed by the increased governmental allocation of funds for education that they hardly take the time to detail who is benefiting from this increase, which as has been shown is not indicative of how



much actually reaches the children. Whatever the amount, it is certainly not out of school children. The article reveals that “resources increased in both relative and absolute terms and spending per elementary student rose from \$25 to \$44 despite higher enrollment,” and yet this money never reaches working children (Bing Wu). By spending more on those children already in schools and continuing to ignore those who need the most help, an already significant gap is solidifying into a chasm of dismal proportions.

India needs a more serious approach by the forces most capable of changing this situation: its politicians. Specifically, forbidding all forms of child labor will dissuade employers from counting on child labor and result in a number of unanticipated improvements. For example, if a family knows that a child labor is illegal, then they may be less likely to have children in the future because they know they cannot simply be used as tools of economic procurement. But banning child labor alone is never the complete answer; it is only part of the solution. Perhaps the most important variable is an education system that is serious about caring for its children. The 4.7 million children in Andhra Pradesh who spend their days toiling in the sun need a government that is willing to put its money where its mouth is and provide the teachers and supplies necessary to help them achieve what is, at the most basic level, their right.



# 4

## ARGUMENT FOR EDUCATION

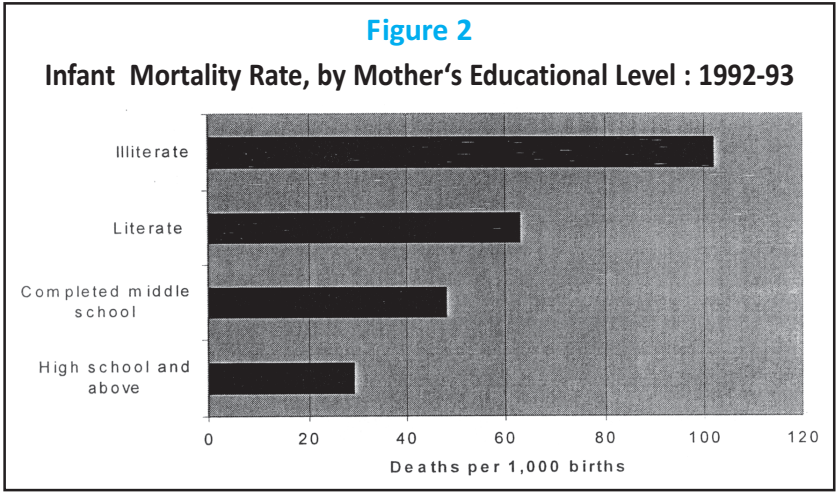
One thing that you will not hear from those bemoaning the plight of the poor who they claim cannot afford an education, from government figures signaling an increase in education expenditures, or from legislation attempting to “regulate” child labor, is exactly what education means for the children. Vague phrases like “India will be completely literate in x number of years” or “every child will be in school” decorate policies that have so far shown nothing but maintenance of the rigid separation between the privileged and underprivileged. For those lucky few who persevere and defy society’s expectations, a new world awaits them. Old myths are brought tumbling down and propaganda once accepted as truth is replaced by the ability to determine what is right on their own. They earn the capacity to articulate and fight for rights that have since their birth been withheld. What is more, bestowing these rudimentary rights to children is inextricably linked to India’s capability to compete on an international level. The best interests of the nation, in unison with those of the elite classes, are in lowering birth rates and producing a capable workforce, both of which are best accomplished by universalizing education.

Young girls, arguably the most discriminated section, stand to inherit a wealth of benefits from education. Myriad fears and concerns surround the controversial decision to keep them in school. Shobharani, a seventeen-year-old student from the village of Kistapur in Andhra Pradesh, sat down and discussed the difficulties she has experienced in pursuing her degree (Case Study 7). The daughter of an uneducated father, she was initially enrolled in school. But her mother passed away, and her father was compelled to take her out of school to take care of domestic work. When the MV Foundation approached her father and attempted to persuade him to allow her to attend one of their residential bridge camps, he reluctantly acquiesced. She tells that until recently her father and brothers looked on her studies with skepticism, uncertain about what would come of it. More than anything, however, she says

that there was a fear of the unknown and a lack of faith in her ability. This is evident in the attitudes of her family post-acceptance to intermediate and in their gradual approval as her studies progressed. The doubt by her family was difficult for Shobharani, who says that her studies and the effort needed to keep her marks up proved far easier on her than the absence of encouragement from relatives. Despite this, she persevered and continues her quest at Malipet Government Junior College, where she is in the intermediate final year. As for her thoughts on the benefits of education, an intimidating question that is decidedly difficult for a teenager to reflect on, she spoke succinctly. She asserts that “education gives confidence in life...it teaches good behavior, conduct, and character. There is no fear of life. Without education,” she says, “there is always fear.”

Some of the things that help assuage this fear can be very basic. They can involve the confidence to ask for help when someone is sick or even simply the awareness of injustice. It has been noted that “an educated woman demands and receives better care for herself and her sick children, ensures better standards of personal and domestic hygiene” and “has more say in running her household” (Tharoor, p 295). One can hope that eventually this will carry over into the arena of job pay, where women in India “are paid less than 40% of what men are paid” (Mohanty, p 28)

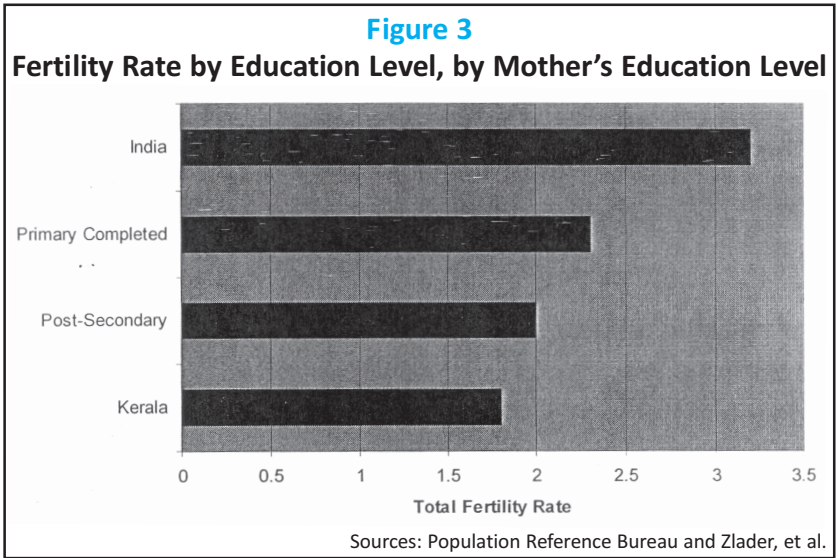
By looking at the infant mortality rate and overall fertility rate in India against the backdrop of the mother’s educational level, it becomes



clear that the entire society benefits from their enrollment. The infant mortality rate for illiterate women is over one hundred deaths per thousand births, while for women who have completed their high school education this figure falls to below thirty.

The fertility rate (Figure 3) exemplifies a relationship with education that is no less noteworthy. In line with the theory that the best contraceptive is education, these results show that the exceptionally high fertility rate of India as a whole, at 3.2, is considerably reduced upon the completion of primary schooling, where the fertility rate drops to 2.3. By the post-secondary level, the rate shrinks to 2.0. These results indicate a connection between education and lowered infant mortality and overall fertility rate that is impossible to repudiate.

One case that is particularly interesting is that of Kerala. The Indian state of Kerala remains an anomaly, where literacy rates for women are more than double the rest of the country. A concentrated effort to bring universal literacy to its citizens has resulted in the state leading in almost every single quality of life indicator. Women enjoy an 85% literacy level and this can in part be attributed to the higher status that they have gradually achieved through education (Population Reference Bureau). A self-sustaining cycle is created wherein education begets more education; the greater number of women who go to school, the more that are capable of fighting to ensure that future generations are not



deprived of this opportunity.

Much has been made of India's recent surge into the mix of the international economy. This rapid development has triggered intense debates that have even carried over into places such as the 2004 presidential campaign in the United States. Without a workforce that is able to grow, however, India will never form into a long-term competitor and will continue to lack political and economic leverage on a global scale. Eventually, success will stagnate and the country will be unable to remain competitive if the literacy rate continues to drag its heels. High-technology companies rely on a skilled and literate workforce, but low-tech jobs are also affected by education level. The focus on the flashier high-tech jobs has overshadowed the importance of literacy in traditional occupations such as agriculture, which accounts for over two-thirds of India's workforce. "The correlation between literacy and productivity needs no explanation," mentions Shashi Tharoor, a Harvard graduate from India and long-time U.N. official, but it is important to elucidate that primary education has the most direct causal effect on income growth (Tharoor, p 188). Sharmistha Self and Richard Grabowski's study in 2003 to determine which levels of education had a greater impact on income growth in India, concludes that the correlation analysis indicates "a strong positive relation between all education levels and growth," while noting that primary education demonstrates the greatest causal impact (Self, p 54). Primary education in India can be seen, therefore, to have the greater impact not only in terms of individual income, but also in relation to the overall economy. This is not to stray from the main point of this article, that education for children formerly forced to work as laborers is an invaluable and appallingly violated right, but only to show that it is in fact these very children that bear the burden of India's future.

The future, though, is far from certain, as education continues to elude the majority of the population in a meaningful manner. The debate over whether universal education is actually attainable remains heated even in the highest echelons of the educational administration. Lata Vaidyanathan, principal of the elite Modern School in New Delhi, whose motto in English means "Perfection Cannot Be Achieved by the Weak," seems to misinterpret this maxim as meaning that the poor do not deserve a chance at education. While labeling herself a "realist," she proclaims that universalizing education in India "will remain a pipe-

dream,” explaining that “there is nothing wrong in dreaming...but, between dreaming and doing, one needs to be awake” (“Is It Possible to Have Free and Compulsory Education?”). Her dismissive tone, which implies a motto more akin to “Education Cannot Be Achieved by the Poor,” and the high esteem in which she is held in education circles only intensify the need for whole-scale changes in India’s mindset. Because of views such as hers, the struggles of children like E. Raju, who lost the use of his arm in an auto-wreck while trying to fund his education, take on added significance (Case Study 12). Raju continues to persevere and is dedicated to challenging statistics which “show that not more than 20 percent of all those who enroll in Class I ultimately complete Class X” (Sinha, “Is It Possible to Have Free and Compulsory Education?”). This figure is even lower for the Scheduled Castes, of which he is a member, and despite just recently completing Class VII at the age of twenty-two, he has no intention of stopping there.

Clearly, the argument for education is far from being won or lost by either side. The dangerous disconnect between policy and implementation has, in some areas, been taken up by NGOs with clear goals of bridging this divide. Their successes bring hope to children such as Shobharani and Raju and suggest that there may soon be a time when India will no longer have to be satisfied by citing higher literacy rates than other developing countries, a time when its success will speak for itself.





## THE MV FOUNDATION

The Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation, or MV Foundation, began working in Ranga Reddy tof Andhra Pradesh, India in 1991 and has been a leader in the movement to transform society, specifically in the areas of child labor and education. MV Foundation currently operates in more than 6,000 villages covering 137 mandals in thirteen districts in Andhra Pradesh, wherein it strives to achieve its uncompromising one-point agenda: to ensure that no child works and all children go to school. To date, the organization has helped place over 320,000 working children into formal schools. With the help of 30,000 education activists mobilized by MV Foundation, over 45,000 child laborers have completed residential Bridge Course Camps aimed at turning working children into students. These bridge camps are a manifestation of the understanding that children who have not been to school before, or who have been forced to dropout, are often unprepared to enter formal schools directly. They represent the knowledge that these children require a special, accelerated education program specifically tailored to prime them for initial entry or reentry into the formal school sector. This has been instrumental in making 1,000 villages in the project area child labor free. The belief that education is a fundamental right and that child labor is unacceptable in any form helps shape the core philosophy of the organization, which is best expressed by its five non-negotiables.

One of the most effective aspects of the program is that it seeks to utilize the infrastructure already in place rather than creating parallel institutions. As Sucheta Mahajan notes, “the MV Foundation is not oppositional in its approach, its self-image is that of a facilitator, infusing life into inert institutions set up by the government” and “strengthening the fabric of civil society” (39). A bridge camp, for example, is not intended to take the place of schools. Its first and only priority is readying children to be mainstreamed into government schools. Mobilizing the community to take up these issues on their own, without sustained

## The Non-Negotiables

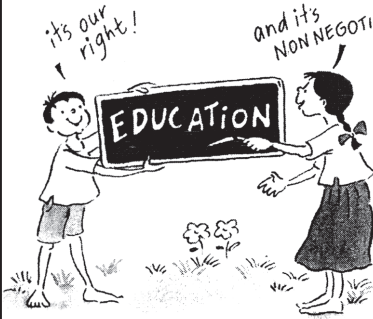
- *All children must attend full-time formal day schools.*  
Night schools or part-time education centres are unacceptable.
- *Any child out of school is a child laborer.*  
The definition of child labour encompasses every non-school going child, irrespective of whether the child is engaged in wage or non-wage work, or whether he/she is working for the family/others in a hazardous or non-hazardous occupation, employed on a daily wage or on contract basis or as bonded labor.
- *All labor is hazardous and harms the overall growth and development of the child.*
- *There must be total abolition of child labor.*  
Any law regulating child work is unacceptable.
- *Any justification perpetuating the existence of child labor must be condemned.*  
Arguments about the 'harsh reality of the family, poverty, necessity of children's earnings for the family, lack of interest among parents, poor quality of teachers and schools, irrelevance of education in providing employment, loss of relevant skills among educated children and so on...are all anti-children and go against their real development.

direct intervention, is also a key to ensuring that the process is capable of being replicated. Camps are organized to speak with local youth and inform them about the rights of children, after which the youth themselves are charged with organizing and conducting weekly meetings to discuss relevant issues in the village. These groups are known as Child's Right Protection Committees (CRPCs) and are crucial to the village's ability to address child labor and child marriage. Details of the frequency and substance of the meetings are kept by the village and mandal-level coordinators of the MV Foundation. This is only one example of many different structures that take shape with the organization's help. Parents, teachers, and local political leaders are all deeply involved in the process.

The overall progress in eradicating child labor and enrolling children into schools within MV Foundation's project area has signaled a direct challenge to views that education is beyond the reach of the poorest sectors of society. It is important to keep in mind that all of this has been accomplished without providing economic incentives or compensation to either the children or their families.

## Two Village Experiences

In Madharam, a small village in Ranga Reddy district, the presence of the MV Foundation has directly resulted in the reduction of child labor from one hundred and five in 2000 to only fifteen in 2005.<sup>3</sup> In 1995, there were 7



acres of cottonseed farms with forty girl children working them. As child labor decreased and the girls enrolled in schools, the cottonseed production stopped. The community adjusted and is now growing commercial cotton, pulses, mirchi, turmeric, and corn. Out of the forty girls who quit working cottonseed and enrolled in school, twenty-six continued their

education past tenth grade. These children want to learn, they are capable of learning, and finally someone is empowering their ambition.

The villagers were enthusiastic about our discussions, but they were very frustrated with a number of variables currently compromising their efforts. The discussion focused on the shortcomings of the local government school. The villagers informed that there were only five teachers responsible for teaching five hundred and fifty children and argued that some of the children now working in the fields do so because the quality of education is very poor. They emphasized that the five teachers not 3 Information gathered from personal visit to village on June 15th, 2005. only teach poorly but sometimes show up late if they show up at all. The villagers were very sincere in their desire to educate their children and have put pressure, which has so far produced no results, on the government at the mandal, district, and state level. In all cases, however, the parents were very adamant about keeping children in school when possible.

At one point, the enthusiasm erupted into a sea of voices each politely trying to drown out the other in order to express essentially the same point. The village is planning to conduct a "dharna," which is a protest aimed at garnering the government's attention. They will form a roadblock, with all of the villagers sitting on the main highway to stop traffic from all directions until a government official arrives. Unable to reach the proper authorities through conventional means (although this has become a semi-structured

3 Information gathered from personal visit to village on June 15th, 2005.

procedure), this event will open the lines of communication and ensure that the government is aware of their demand for more teachers. Importantly, this is a direct expression of the intensity of their desire. These parents are not passively complaining about the issue, they have created inventive responses to apathetic officials.

***“This opportunity is at our doorsteps.  
We must take advantage.”***

**Sanjeev Kumar,**  
Vice Sarpanch, Muthnoor Village

In the village of Muthnoor, I met with various members of the local administration. The village Sarpanch, Vice Sarpanch, five of the villages nine ward members, and a number of CRPC members participated in the meeting. A short briefing informed me that out of the four hundred children in the village, only twenty-two are currently out of school and weekly meetings are conducted to discuss ways to help these parents understand the importance of education. This number is down from last year’s total of fifty-six. The MV Foundation has one organizer in the village but has recently ceased its formal operations and given over the reins to the village itself.

**The following is a brief synopsis of some main points:**

- T. Champath Rao, village sarpanch, is also the CRPC convener for his mandal and has been working with the MV Foundation for four years. He, like many of the others, worked as a child laborer when he was younger and this topic is of particular concern to him. Fully subscribing to the MV Foundation’s policies, he campaigns against child labor and notes that the CRPC is now continuing to implement the same 4 Visit conducted on July 21st, 2005. procedures that MV Foundation did. The Foundation trained the villagers to this end and has now left, offering advice and support only when needed.
- Sanjeev Kumar, vice sarpanch, is concerned that the village is losing so much without education. He works to convince the parents that education is the only way to obtain social transformation and is particularly important in today’s society. “Now,” he says, “this opportunity is at our doorsteps,” referring to the improved facilities resulting from village pressure, “we must take advantage.”
- One youth group member, Santosh, described his contributions to the movement, stating that before he heads off to study he meets individually the parents in the morning whose children are not attending

school. He tries to motivate them to enroll their children in school and is confident that perseverant attention by village elders will eventually provide the proper leverage.

- Sampath, one of the ward members, supports MV Foundation and encourages enrollment by motivating parents. He attends meetings and checks-up on how schools are doing. As of now, he feels the schools are satisfactory, but this has come about through constant pressure applied by the present group over the past two years.
- Yesumani, another ward member, noted that there were problems convincing some parents to send children to school, but her specific focus is campaigning against child marriage. The most common objection to education for young girls is that “they will only end up living in their husband’s house,” and this secondary citizen status often deters parents from making sacrifices for them. She is particularly proud of the fact that the village has prevented forty-four child marriages to date.

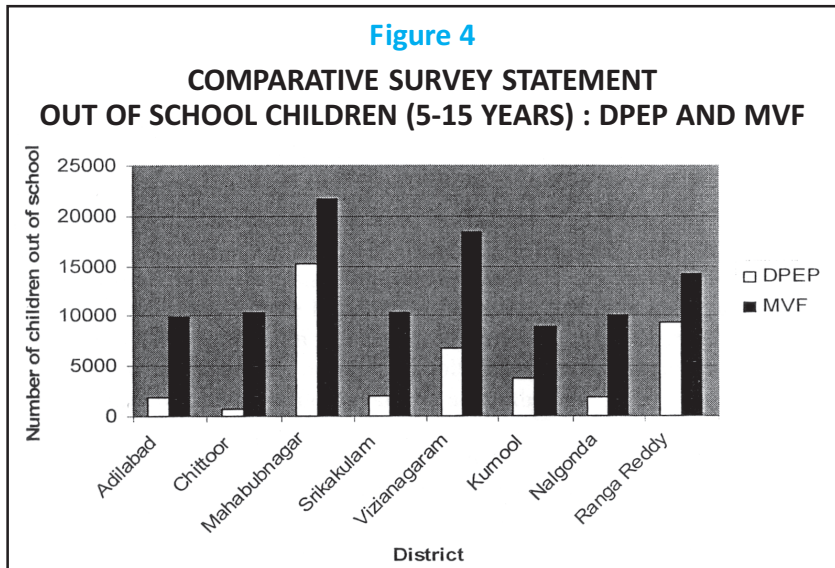
These two villages are by no means isolated examples. Each village that I visited had their own similar and yet individualized methods for dealing with the same issue. The passion and assuredness the men and women I spoke with throughout the districts of Adilabad, Ranga Reddy, and Nalgonda demonstrated towards eradicating child labor and educating their children is perhaps the most surprising aspect. These are villages where child labor has traditionally enjoyed a disturbing prevalence, and yet within a few short years they have managed to reverse the attitudinal tide and elicit a sincere desire for education.

The success of the MV Foundation has spurred the creation of other programs with derivative methodologies, although all share the identical goal of increasing literacy and improving access to education. One notable example is the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), which, according to the Government of India’s Board of Education website, “moves away from the schematic piecemeal approach of the earlier programmes and takes a holistic view of primary education with emphasis on decentralised management, community mobilisation and district specific planning based on contextually and research based inputs.” In other words, a souped-up description of the MV Foundation’s strategy. The central government supplies 85% of the project cost, although this is resourced by external funding, and each participating state government funds the remainder. Despite utilizing MV Foundation’s strategy, there are substantial problems with

village assessment protocols, specifically relating to how many children are actually out of school. And the government boasts of reduced out-of-school figures that are never actualized.

Looking at the Comparative Survey conducted by the MV Foundation on the difference between the statistics kept by the DPEP and their own files, it becomes clear that there are some epic discrepancies in need of resolution. When MV Foundation asserts that out of school children (5-15 years old) total 93,875 in the 8 districts listed, then suspicion overshadows the impossible optimism emanating from the DPEP's vastly smaller figure of 39,643. A difference of 45,000 children is more than substantial. There are villages such as Gudihathnoor, for instance, where the DPEP found only 171 children out of school; a stark contrast from the 2223 that MV Foundation found.

The goal of truly improving the child labor situation in India will require statistics that "look the devil in the eyes," coming to terms with the true state of affairs and acting accordingly. After all, this is not just an economic or political argument. The real goal of education is not to make charts and graphs on paper look better, but instead to affect change in the lives of real people. Molding estimates to fit certain agendas belittles the plight of these children and ensures that basic rights will continue to be viewed as privileges that are inaccessible to those who need them most.



It is the lives of these students, their families, and their communities that provide the impetus for this report. The MV Foundation is first and foremost dedicated to eradicating child labor and putting children into school, but experience has taught them that it is equally important to monitor the success of these students. A simple but extremely effective hostel follow-up program has materialized from their efforts and is a pivotal aspect of the program until the children reach tenth class.

According to the MV Foundation's Annual Report ( April 2002), local schools are preferred for children who attended bridge courses, while some of the older students requiring more attention enter the Social Welfare Hostels, hostels specifically reserved for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe children. This aspect of the program has developed over the years, and can include the supply of provisions such as stationary, pens, nail clippers, and shampoo. The Annual Report provides a closer look at its past development and current activities.

Because of the nature of the MV Foundation's approach to education, namely a rights-based approach, it essentially relinquishes its authority after the children reach the age of fourteen. At this age, children have exceeded the age under which education is viewed as a fundamental right. They are exposed to choices, opportunities, and other

### **MVF Hostel Follow-up Program**

In the process of such close monitoring and follow-up of children in the hostel it has been found that they would function better if there was a linkage with the parents and the community. At present there exists a committee to review the functioning of the hostels, which is mostly comprised of the local official and the elected representatives. There are also committees of the children in most of these hostels to review their conditions of stay and study. In some of the hostels parents, schoolteachers and children have come together and review the progress of the children once in a month.

During summer vacations children from the hostel were given special coaching to cope with lessons in higher classes. After completion of class ten children were counseled on the options available for further studies. They were helped to join the polytechnic courses, computer courses and also pursue under graduate studies. Several inputs were given to the system of social welfare hostels, especially girl's hostels, in order to make it a place where children would want to stay, study in and feel proud of.

Source: MVF Annual Report (2001-2002)

variables, such as parental pressure, that exponentially increase the number of paths open to them. In a very basic way, it is easy to understand why MV Foundation's role in their lives after this age undergoes a transformation. With over 600,000 children in the project area, it would be simply unrealistic to expect the foundation to provide services such as school placement or job placement, for example. The foundation makes a crucial distinction, assuming the role of an ensurer of rights while rejecting the role of a provider of services.

There are exceptions to this policy, however, and because of MV Foundation's extensive connections in Hyderabad and with surrounding educational institutions it is willing to offer support to those students who approach them with a specific plan. Should a student who has recently completed intermediate come up to MV Foundation for placement into a particular college in a predetermined field, MV Foundation is more than willing to offer any assistance available. What it is not able to do is respond to a child who comes to them simply asking for generic help ("any" job as opposed to a "particular" job). Resource limitations require a plan of action, and, when a plan is present, the organization's connections and dedication supply the assistance.

In the end, the foundation has developed a methodology that best accomplishes its twin goals of eradicating child labor and ensuring the right to education. Their mission is propelled by the belief that this is a child's right and that no other reason is required, but the spin-offs of this pursuit help delineate why this right is so invaluable. While not all of these children will go on to pursue a PhD, their experiences and the knowledge gained are permanent qualities that elevate their quality of life, instilling within them a new attitude and a new outlook on life.



## 6

## SUCCESSES AND DIFFICULTIES OF STUDENTS

Throughout this study, I have met with hundreds of children who until very recently were destined to be another sad statistic on yet another report condemning child labor. All of these children are products of the MV Foundation's bridge course program, the one variable in their life that has enabled them to alter the outcome of this equation.

Their successes help flush out exactly how the fight to end child labor and universalize education improves their situation, while their difficulties illuminate the multi-various reasons why this fight remains crucial. More than anything, however, these children represent real life defiance of a still prevalent theory. This theory, the Poverty Argument, at best trivializes their struggle for education, while at its worst refuses to acknowledge it at all.

One of the first things thought of when contemplating the benefits of an education are the tangible improvements, the visible indicators requiring minimal effort to observe. Things such as salary, job title, and other purely ephemeral indicators come to mind, especially in today's materially-obsessed society, but a plethora of subtle yet equally significant developments lie just beneath the surface. Waiting for the glance of discerning eyes or simply a little attention, these improbable but widespread developments continue unabated by the lack of recognition. Things such as confidence, knowledge, happiness, and the presence of a childhood are often overlooked because they are difficult to gauge and for the simple reason that they are impossible to refute. It is easier to ignore them than to be forced to admit their value. Nonetheless, it is important to evaluate both sides to obtain a full grasp of all the implications.

Beginning with their job, income, and skills gained, the first trickle of students from MV Foundation's camp to enter the job arena is beginning to feel the advantages of an education. There are problems, however, like the minute size of the formal sector. According to Manmohan Singh, the "so-called organized sector," of formal sector,

comprises only ten percent of the total labor market. Other recent studies observe that “the implications of the informal economy are huge. It’s not just about pay, but also about labour standards and how many workers are frozen out of the networks needed to move up the job ladder and improve their quality of life” (Avirgan). The large size of the informal sector is in part due to the nature of the Indian economy, but also the lack of skilled workers available for jobs in the formal sector. These children, and the 4.7 million others working in the fields instead of studying, subtract from the overall number of workers available for the burgeoning technology and private sector employment and inhibit India’s ability to fulfill its economic potential. Shakti Sinha, studying jobless growth for the Observer Research Foundation, similarly detects the “most striking feature” of the structure of employment in India, which the article declares to be “the miniscule size of the formal sector, and consequently, the overwhelming presence of the informal sector.” All of this signals a need for improvement so that ninety percent of India’s workforce can stop living “on the margins of the economic system” (Shakti Sinha). The outskirts of the system can be characterized as being made up of decidedly rocky terrain, composed of “low wages, unsafe working conditions, inadequate social safety net arrangements, failure of collective bargaining mechanisms due to geographical and political diverseness and a general failure to develop a voice” (Shakti Sinha). For the first time, however, many children are finding their voice, a voice that only grows as it is reinforced by that of entire communities. While no one will argue that this voice is always heard, it is certainly becoming increasingly hard to disregard.

One graduate of the program, a 21 year old student named Bhagavanthu, comes from an uneducated family of agricultural laborers and spent most of his childhood working in a hotel washing dishes. Having never attended school until after bridge camp, he was directly enrolled into Class VIII. After failing his tenth class exam, he received tutoring in Hindi and worked at a phone booth while waiting to retake the exam, which he eventually passed. During intermediate he divided his time between his studies and working as a night watchman, forced to keep a small job in order to eat. He is studying for his B.A. in Economics at the moment while working at the Taj Tristar hotel, where he is making Rs 3500/- a month. This is clearly more than he would make per month as a laborer in his native village, and can be directly contributed to his education because he would not have been hired without a certificate

stating that he finished college.

Sreenu, another graduate of the program, works for Vivace Sonics as a senior technician. Vivace Sonics makes and sells ultrasonic machines and he is charged with the responsibility of testing the printer circuit-boards (PCBs), a job that earns him Rs 3500/- a month. Both he and Bhagavanthu have jobs that would have been inaccessible without the work of the MV Foundation - barring a miracle of similar magnitude.

Other jobs include medical lab technicians, teachers, and receptionists, but it is also remarkable how many children choose to work in socially-conscious fields. Hariya, for example, is a hostel monitor for MV Foundation who visits various hostels to ensure that the children are given proper facilities and supplies (Case Study 1). His occupation reflects the desire by many of these children to help further the cause of the Foundation. A large percentage of these children are first-generation learners and this battle has a particular piquancy for them. They observe the very tangible results of the MV Foundation, specifically the return of their childhood and the end of their laboring, and come to understand that one of the inherent effects of the program is that it grants them a future. Each child is socially conscientious and focused on improving the iniquities that plagued their childhood.

Of the children surveyed, roughly forty percent held jobs while the small majority still continues their education. Of those currently employed full-time, however, their incomes invariably exceed that of their parents. Even part-time workers who are continuing their schooling often surpass the income of their parents and are able to send home more than if they worked full-time as agricultural laborers. The acquisition of skills necessary to make improvement a permanent aspect of their life complement the new jobs and higher incomes, but perhaps more importantly at this stage is the legacy that education leaves in its wake.

Many of these children lack examples of success, especially in terms of education, from whose efforts they might get inspired. Now, they have morphed into the exact role models that they were deprived of while growing up. Once again from Tharoor's work, he speaks of one child, Charlis, in a fictional account, who now "was aiming higher than anyone in his family, in his entire community, has ever done before. He was planning to go to university" (p 94). Just like Charlis, these individuals are blazing trails in hitherto unexplored territories, trails which widen as they age. It is useful to look at this aspect of education as a tangible

benefit as well as intangible. While it is not possible to gauge or define exactly how this legacy plays out in the decision to stop sending a child to work and enroll him/ her in school, the numbers suggesting its existence are very real. In some cases, the students speak of it as a palpable, undeniable factor. Johan, a student that I spoke with, directly contributed his continued perseverance to a few individuals in his village who recently completed their post-graduate degrees. He stated that “their experience is always somewhere in the back of my mind.” His story, accessible in the case studies section, is demonstrative of many of the MV Foundation’s main points. The following table, which compares the numbers of out-of-school children before and after MV Foundation’s intervention in a number of villages, illuminates how this affect manifests itself. The particular villages have been selected because many of the children I interviewed call these places home.

The first table indicates the school-going children versus non-school-going in the initial years of intervention. The second table shows a general increase in enrollment coupled with a decrease in out-of-school children. Mokilathanda, a village in one of MV Foundation’s first major project areas, has experienced a 360° turnaround. From having over

Comparative Status of Selected Villages (Before and After MVF's Intervention)								
Initial Years								
Mandal	Village	Year	School going			Non school going		
			Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Shankerpally	Mokilathanda	1992-93	11	4	15	69	86	155
Doma	Kistapur	1999-2000	243	187	430	31	39	70
Tandur	Chandravancha	1996-97	70	57	127	5	21	26
Vikarabad	Ananthagiri	1998-99	34	24	58	1	1	2

Comparative Status of Selected Villages (Before and After MVF's Intervention)							
2004-2005							
Mandal	Village	School going			Non school going		
		Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Shankerpally	Mokilathanda	121	97	218	15	21	36
Doma	Kistapur	212	198	410	12	18	30
Tandur	Chandravancha	104	109	213	6	3	9
Vikarabad	Ananthagiri	28	40	68	Nil		

90% of the children out of school in 1992-93, the village now boasts a school-going rate of 86%. The legacy that education leaves behind is one major reason for the turnaround, as indicated by the statement given by Shobharani, from the village of Kistapur, in which she states that “education will be a priority for [her] children.” (Case Study 7) Enrollment figures in these villages and the passionate testimony of these first-generation learners attest to the organization’s success and are a harbinger of better things to come.

Delving into the less quantifiable aspects of education, one of the most powerful benefits, and one of the most apparent when speaking in person, is an increase in personal confidence. It has been said that “the greatest difficulty with the children from the slums is that they don’t know how to ask a question,” or that “they don’t raise their hands” (Weiner 69). Often stigmatized into believing that it is not their place to ask questions, these children refrain from entertaining their curiosity. Education teaches these children that, far from improper, it is extremely important to ask questions; in fact, much of the learning process is discovering how to ask questions. The children become emboldened as their education progresses and, as I discovered, eager to inquire about almost anything. From my origin and customs to why I was speaking with them, their curiosity and confidence overcame the intimidation that village children often feel in the presence of a foreigner, undoubtedly a result of their education.

Although many of the students specifically addressed the topic of confidence, one was particularly well-spoken. Swamy, who tended buffaloes as a child, now enjoys his education and uses it to help monitor hospital treatment for current MV Foundation volunteers and students (Case Study 2). Speaking to a doctor and reading the directions for a prescription can be a daunting task for educated individuals, much less someone who is illiterate. Yet Swamy says that “education lets me speak more confidently with the doctor and look him in the eyes. It helps because I can ask questions when I am not sure of something until I really understand.” This degree of confidence is bolstered in part by the distinct pride that he feels knowing the prodigious odds he has overcome.

Another crucial benefit of an education is the intelligence acquired. A universal response by those I interviewed when asked what was offered from an education was cold hard knowledge. When Rambabu began to relate the story of his childhood, of how his parents refused to

enroll him into school, of nearly drowning in an open drain during the monsoon, of his parent's illiteracy, I was hugely impressed to hear that he completed intermediate (Case Study 4). That he procured a monetary award and funding for intermediate as a result of achieving marks of 780 out of 1000 is extraordinary. Not every child will win the Pratibha Award like Rambabu, but he demonstrates the potential that every child in every village has for excellence. The legacy of an education is disseminated throughout the villages, reverberating in often unintentional places and as a secondhand benefit, but the powerful combination of knowledge and potential ensconces itself into the very being of these children. While paychecks, houses, and possessions may come and go, one's potential and knowledge become integral aspects of life, altering and forever taking their place in the constellation of events and qualities that constitute reality for these children.

In addition to these invaluable aspects of education, comes a corollary that is no less worthy of mention – the presence of a childhood. Inside the stories and experiences of these children are bright smiles too infrequently seen, laughs lost in the hot sun. The faces of these children light up when I ask about friendships developed, games played, and knowledge learned. Their eyes glow and, instead of looking down while divulging the hardships of the field, they eagerly relay stories of joy and playfulness. There is a glimmer of hope bubbling through the years of toil, a sign that though for some childhood has come late it is never too little.

Those who have tasted the life free of labor are the most passionate defenders of their right to its fruits. Dharasingh, who is twenty-one and studying for his B.A. at Mahabubnagar Degree College traveled from his native village to Hyderabad to find a school for a fourteen year-old bride-to-be (Case Study 3). He recognizes the pressure that many young men and women feel from home to marry before completing school. To combat this, he spends most of his free time furthering the cause of the MV Foundation as a volunteer and has, to date, motivated nearly 250 children to enroll in school.

Other arguments suggest that education has the potential to destroy centuries of heritage and is inimical to local traditions. If retaining one's heritage means starvation and joblessness, however, then these children are not willing to make such sacrifices. These children often view the decision to go to school as a choice between life or death, and they are choosing life. The decision to preserve one's culture or decide where one will work is a luxury that these children do not have.



## 7

## CONCLUSION

This movement is not without struggle. The image coming into focus through the course of my interviews is not that education is either easy or impossible, but that with the proper conviction and determination one has the potential to succeed. There is a tremendous desire by these children and their parents to improve their lot. The MV Foundation's tireless work has demonstrated that with encouragement success is achievable. The alumni of MV Foundation's early years are still young, their lives still fraught with difficulty, but they are now equipped to take on these challenges.

**VASTUNNAM VASTUNNAM PILLALAM**  
**(THE CHILDREN ARE COMING)**  
**(A POPULAR SONG WITH CHILDREN OF RBC CAMPS)**

We are the children who never  
Had a dream nor play  
We were the ones who let  
You rest as we worked all day.

Led by the bedtime tales of poverty  
Fed by the states show of charity  
Have we not led the life of beasts of burden  
Have you ever thought the same of your own children?



**Case Study 1****From Bonded Laborer to Hostel Monitor**

Hariya is a twenty-one year old student from the Mokilathanda village in Shankarpally Mandal. He is from the Lambada community (S T). He has two older brothers who never attended school and one younger brother who studied up to class 3 before dropping out. Currently, his three brothers live in Mokilathanda with his mother and father, who are also illiterate. Both of his older brothers are construction workers while his younger brother, who is eighteen, works for a giant German seed company called Proagro. He has presently completed Intermediate from Chaitanya Junior College and is working as Hostel monitor for MV Foundation.

For Hariya, education was something that never crossed his mind until the MV Foundation made its way to his village. When MV Foundation found him, he was working as a bonded laborer in a village called Chinnashankerpally. He was enrolled into Thumkulaguda bridge camp in Parigi with no previous schooling and then entered and completed primary school. He concluded high school in Ghatkesar and went on to Chaitanya Junior College where he finished a year late after failing his first examination. With his family urging him to come home and his brothers hard at work, packing his bags and returning home would have been the easier route. But through his quest for education he has become quite accustomed to challenges; he studied hard and passed the exam.

Presently applying for college, Hariya is on path to earn his B.A., after which he wants to teach math in primary school. I told him that Shantha Sinha once relayed a story to me of how the young children in bridge camps often laughed at visitors who asked, “What do you want to be?” After the visitors would leave, one child would mock them by asking, “What do you want to be?” to another child who replied, “a

doctor,” or “a teacher,” anything that they thought we wanted to hear. Laughing, he assured me that his ambition to be a teacher was serious and added sincerely that, “It was a teacher who brought me a new life and I want to help make sure that other children like me get a good education.”

Hariya mentioned that he wants to go to Sundarayya Vignana Government College and thinks that because it is not that expensive to get in he will be able to manage the fees with his present income. That being said, he was grateful for the help that MV Foundation gave him while at Chaitanya Junior College, such as the sponsorship of books and fees. MV Foundation supported him with more than just economic assistance and constantly monitored his attendance in primary and high school, something that was helpful in encouraging him to continue his education. While studying in school he stayed in a social welfare hostel and did not have to work, but during his vacations he went home to his village and worked in construction with his brothers to make some money.

Currently, Hariya monitors hostels for MV Foundation to ensure the attendance of the children and receives free food and accommodation at the hostels. As a follow-up person, his job is to make sure that these children do not drop out from school, and he is equipped with the authority to take the appropriate action or inform someone who can if need be. Right now is admission time for the hostels and his specific duties include making sure that the children have soap, nail-clippers, and other items for daily use. Hariya sends about one-third of his fifteen-hundred rupee/ month salary home to his family. His salary is equal to his younger brother’s pay and slightly less than his older brothers, but Hariya was quick to add that what his job lacks in pay is made up for by its security and ease. Instead of having to rely on weather patterns and the market, Hariya knows that he will receive his check next month; instead of hauling 50 kg bags of rice or manually plowing a field, he simply picks up a pen and makes notes where needed. Despite these obvious benefits, his parents are relentless in their request for his return to the village to work and get married. He is opposed to the idea because he would personally prefer to work in an office one day rather than in agriculture or construction.

All of this comes from a young man who spent his childhood days working as a bonded laborer. He notes that some of the benefits of an

education include, among others, the ability to distinguish between good and bad, job mobility, and the degree of self-worth that he has acquired. Many illiterate people in the villages, he says, are intimidated by signs on the city buses and are often unable to tell which sign points to which city. This alone is often enough to dissuade them from leaving home. Small things that many in developed countries take for granted, like the ability to read a sign, are capable of instilling a significant amount of fear in these villagers who lack education. His education allows him to move freely around the country while looking for work or just simply traveling. ❖

## Case Study 2

### Education Gave the Confidence

K. Swamy is a young man from a poor family who has emerged victorious in his struggle to acquire an education. A twenty-five year old member of the scheduled caste Madiga, Swamy has faced more than his fair share of opposition in his life. His father passed away when he was younger, followed by one of his older brothers, and Swamy himself was forced to drop out of school after class 2 and begin working. His family owns ten acres of land and both he and his older brothers and sisters are married. But for one brother who dropped out after 9<sup>th</sup> class, all of them including his mother are illiterate. One of his brothers works in agriculture and the other is in the milk business.

After dropping out of class 2 and working for a while, he joined MV Foundation's bridge camp in Abdullapur and was then enrolled into class 4 after completion. He continued his studies at Ibrahimpatnam residential school until class 10 before attending intermediate school. Unfortunately, his studies at Government Junior College in Hayathnagar were not successful and because he did not understand English or the lessons he was unable to pass the exam. His college was in the afternoon from 1-5 and he generally was not interested in going, preferring to spend his time eating or sleeping. The fact that the language and lessons were a large deterrent was compounded by the degree of autonomy that children earn after class 10. His parents had very little leverage with which to persuade him; they could not simply threaten to take away his car, take away his allowance, or make him stay home from a weekend party.

During school, Swamy stayed in the social welfare hostel and did

not work. When he went home for the holidays, however, he worked his families land to supplement the work force. MV Foundation supported him in a number of ways during high school by arranging for school books, pens, and notebooks.

Swamy has been working with MV Foundation for about seven years now and fears that because of this long hiatus and his marriage it will be difficult to continue his education. He works in a hospital and oversees the treatment of children or volunteers from MV Foundation camps who are sent to the city hospitals for any health-related reasons. This can include making sure that the doctors give them proper treatment and that they are comfortable, something that he would be unable to do without his education and the ability to read. Having an education also enables him to speak more confidently with the doctor, looking in his eyes and inquiring until he understands the situation to his satisfaction.

He makes around 2,500 rupees a month, which adds up to an annual salary of 30,000, and although this is estimated by Swamy to be less than his brothers during a good year he adds that his job is better because his income is secure. His brothers generally work very hard, long hours and are unable to plan their finances because their income is contingent upon a number of uncontrollable variables. Swamy does not send money home to his family because it is not requested. He adds that only one brother works the family land and helps the family by providing some food, such as bags of rice. When there is a drought, on the other hand, the rest of the family joins hands to support him.

Before all of these developments in education and occupation, Swamy was charged with the task of tending to the eight buffaloes the family owned. This involved mainly watching them and taking them for grazing. After Swamy began bridge camp his family sold the buffaloes because there was simply no one else to take care of them. Reflecting on the benefits of education for working children, Swamy noted that times have changed. Before, he says, people were content with whatever they had and only wanted to take care of their family. Now, the population has grown and people are sometimes forced to migrate as they search for work. If an individual wishes to remain in one place and settle down, then an education can play an important role. His education alone has enabled him to procure the job he has, a job that delivers a steady income and the comforting knowledge that he will not have to

pack up his bags and leave when the season ends.

Swamy still lives with his family in the village about thirty kilometers outside of Hyderabad and takes the bus to the city every morning. The bus pass sets him back three hundred and thirty rupees a month. The short transit and cost of transportation are easy to forgive. He knows he is not physically fit for the demands of agricultural work and plus, he adds, there is the added benefit of knowing that he is making a difference. ✕

### Case Study 3

#### Ensure Studies and Insure Life

K. Dharasingh is a twenty-one year old member of the scheduled tribe. He resides in Mahabubnagar with his parents, two older sisters, and three younger brothers. His parents work agriculture and have eight acres of farmland. Both his sisters are married. All of them are illiterate. The oldest of his three younger brothers passed intermediate and was selected as a constable in the police department while the other two brothers are currently studying in eighth and ninth class.

I questioned his presence in Hyderabad. It is a long way from Mahabubnagar for the sake of an interview and I wanted to know what exactly brought him to the city. His answer speaks volumes about the effectiveness of MV Foundation's community mobilization campaign and his own character. Hearing of plans for the marriage of a fourteen-year-old girl who belonged to his community, Dharasingh at once began a movement to stop the marriage. He was acquainted with M. Swetha, the young bride-to-be, and lent a helping hand to her plea to continue her education and avoid marriage. He brought her to Hyderabad to help her enroll in a residential school and will be staying here until she is admitted into a hostel and school.

Dharasingh was a product of the MV Foundation's work in more than one way. He owes his job and education to their hard work in the field of children's rights. Until he was ten years old he took eight buffaloes and two goats for grazing, after which he began doing centering work for four or five years. During these years he was obstructed from any formal education and without the impetus of MV Foundation he would have without a doubt continued down this path. Instead, MV Foundation volunteers contacted Dharasingh and in 1996 at the age of 13 he joined Dharur bridge camp in Ranga Reddy. Despite having no

prior education he was soon prepared for the 7th class state exam and passed, allowing him to enroll into 8th class. He attended Ghatkesar High School before enrolling in Parigi Junior College.

After junior college Dharasingh met the resolute condemnation and stiff refusal of his family and community when he suggested continuing his education further. Forced to work as a laborer, Dharasingh had no choice but to put this dream aside temporarily. As the days passed his determination grew, as did his discontent with not having a hand in choosing his own path in life, and without the blessing of his family or any financial support he began working towards his degree in Mahabubnagar. There he currently studies history, economics, and civics (HEC) and has only one year left before attaining his B.A. In order to fund his education he performed a number of physically taxing jobs, such as making bricks, before acquiring his current position as an agent for the Life Insurance Corporation of India. There were times, he mentions, when the difficulties inhibited his ability to function as a student, and he often missed a few days of classes in order to focus on financial necessities. The disruptions in his education were not enough to break his stride, and no matter the problem or strength of adversity Dharasingh always found his way back to the doorstep of education.

It is almost impossible to imagine a more direct rebuttal to the severe limitations of the 'poverty argument.' With a very low family income of 30,000 rupees a year, Dharasingh's mother and father were convinced that education was worth the sacrifice. Without having to take loans or change their lifestyle his family supported his education upto intermediate. The infectious nature of education took care of the rest, and, though the obstacles facing Dharasingh were multiplied rather than divided when his family changed their minds, his education had already equipped him with the ability to determine his own future. As a life insurance agent he works five or six hours a day for commission and makes 3,000 rupees a month on average while simultaneously attending college. In addition to paying for his education, Dharasingh manages to send 1,500 rupees home to his family each month. He has also started to save some. One cannot overlook the significance of this simple gesture. The fact that he saves money is an indication that his vision extends beyond the typical day to day concerns, a sign that the meaning of work has expanded in his eyes. In addition to a means of providing daily meals, he understands that his income can be used to improve

and secure both his and his family's future. Because his parents are not capable, for instance, Dharasingh funds his younger brothers' schooling, a step that helps ensure that the cycle of education continues in his family.

It is important not to overlook the part that MV Foundation played in his education. From providing coaching classes to textbooks, notebooks, and pens, the Foundation has been an integral component throughout. The hostel follow-ups and constant attention were signs of companionship in what sometimes seemed a long and solitary quest, not to mention the practical assistance that providing stationary lent to his efforts.

Dharasingh states that he had motivated nearly two hundred and fifty children to enroll into schools and camps since he completed tenth class, and he is always on the look-out for more. This is not an official job for him; he is an unpaid volunteer who has simply been convinced there are no excuses for depriving children of their childhood or education. ❖

## Case Study 4

### Sacrifices Eclipsed by the Results

Rambabu, aged 19, is an example of a 'nowhere' child who seized the opportunity to receive an education and used it to get somewhere. Hailing from S C community, his parents are illiterate and has a brother studying 9<sup>th</sup> class. At the age of six he remained at home, not working or studying, until MV Foundation contacted his parents and were able to convince them to send Rambabu to bridge camp and eventually to school. He stayed at Gandipet bridge camp for three years and enrolled into 5th class at Darga Government High School when he was nine years. All of MV Foundation and Rambabu's hard work and good intentions could have been for nothing, however, after Rambabu was swept into an open drain during the rainy season only to be saved by a classmate's brother. By the narrowest of margins he escaped the hands of fate and entered APSW Residential High School, intent as ever on continuing his education and more appreciative than ever of this opportunity. He studied at APSW Residential from 6th to 10th classes, before also attending APSW Intermediate Residential College at Ibrahimpatnam. He was awarded with the prestigious Pratibha award, a distinction that provides a scholarship to pay for his intermediate education, after

scoring 780 out of a possible 1000 on his tenth class examination. Rambabu gave the Rs 5000 award to his father, who then used the money to pay for tuition. At the time of the interview, the nineteen-year-old student was studying for his B.S.W. at Roda Mistry Private College in Gachibowli where he hopes to continue his academic interests.

But not without struggle. The image coming into focus through the course of my interviews is not that education is either easy or impossible, but that with the proper conviction and determination one has the potential to succeed. Landless, Rambabu's parents moved from Chithanoor to Hyderabad where his father works as construction labor while his mother does domestic chores at various houses. His father is doing well as a construction worker but the Rs 3,600 fees has caused him to make serious sacrifices to keep Rambabu in school. When summer vacation rolls around, Rambabu joins his father for some masonry work to supplement the family income. One summer, after his first year of intermediate, he trained for a job at the printing press, but by the next year he was right back helping his father. Despite the strain on his family and the long working hours during the summer, Rambabu never once considered dropping out. His brother is in 9th class as Ibrahimpatnam and Rambabu, in true brotherly fashion, is cognizant of the influence his decisions have and the extent to which his younger brother looks up to him; the fact that his brother is also at the top of his class attests to this.

Throughout all this, he has been supported by MV Foundation in various ways, from hostel follow-ups to books, pens, and notebooks. His parents have also made great sacrifices in both time and money, but hearing from Rambabu and listening to his stories I know that these sacrifices have already been eclipsed by the returns. Although he was not a child labor at the age of six, he knows that this was the only possible path for him outside education. As a beneficiary of education, his awareness of the significance of education is great and it is no surprise that he hopes to pursue his M.S.W. and do social work to help develop the attitudes of the rural community. Rambabu noted at the end of the interview that his parents viewed the purpose of work as day-to-day survival, a stark contrast to his desire to work not only for his own future but for the future of India's hundreds of millions of rural poor. ❧



## Case Study 5

### Persistence in the Worst of Times

A twenty-year-old member of the scheduled caste, Mallesh is an alumnus of MV Foundation's Parigi Bridge Camp. His illiterate mother has two buffaloes, sells the milk and, because they have no land, works as agricultural labor whenever the occasion presents itself in their native village of Pillaipally. Recently, his father, also illiterate, fell from a tree before dying a few days later in the hospital, adding to the already formidable struggles his family was forced to deal with. His three older sisters are all married and uneducated, but his younger brother graduated tenth class and is studying to be an electrician at ITI (Industrial Training Institute).

Mallesh himself went to Ghatkesar Government High School and stayed in the B.C. boys' hostel before being accepted to MKRM Private College in Julloor. There he studied MPC (Math Physics Chemistry) until his father died, at which point he was forced to drop out for a year to take care of his family and so that his brother could afford to stay in school. After a year he joined Anandajyothi Private College in Uppal and switched from MPC to Commerce because it is less expensive. He pays the fees, which is roughly Rs. 4,000 a year, by working as tractor labor during his vacation. Although he only makes about 1,750 for the entire vacation, the government scholarship for Backward Classes covers the rest and his mother contributes one hundred and sixty rupees for his monthly bus pass to college. He is aiming for his Commerce degree and wants to be an accountant eventually, an interesting choice considering all of the financial strife his family has suffered through the years.

Things are looking up for Mallesh now and he is well on his way to achieving his goals, but there was a time when things looked much different. Initially enrolled in school, his academic career came to an early and seemingly fatal crash when he was tossed out of school and into the hands of a local landlord. As a bonded laborer, Mallesh did various forms of agricultural work and spent his afternoons grazing animals. With his education nothing more than a dot in the rearview mirror, MV Foundation found him and got to convince both him and his parents that his proper place was in school. Before long he was freed from his bonds and admitted in Parigi Bridge Camp when he was

fourteen. After a stay at Parigi he was able to pass the state examination and enroll into 8th class and got a seat in government hostel. MV Foundation supported Mallesh with soap, books, pens, and they also followed-up his attendance to make sure he did not drop out. And when he began having trouble in some of his classes MV Foundation was there to offer tutoring.

Even today, when the money is tight, his mother will insist that he return home to help with the bills. When financial struggles ease she is more understanding of his desire to finish college, but even in the worst of times he persists. ❧

## Case Study 6

### For a Source and Fulfilling Future

Not every student succeeds in passing their exams the first time despite their efforts and those of the volunteers surrounding them. Jangaiah has one educated brother and another brother and sister, both of whom are in the 8<sup>th</sup> class. Jangaiah has stumbled slightly on his uphill journey after failing his civics exam this past year at the government junior college in Hayathnagar. Having completed two years already and required to pass this exam to earn any recognition for his exertions, Jangaiah is fully determined to rewrite his civics exam this coming March. He realizes that in order to pursue a degree in Commerce nothing less than solid marks will suffice.

Jangaiah is 19 years and from the S C community. Like almost every child enrolled into MV Foundation's bridge camps, Jangaiah's parents, both illiterate and working as agricultural laborers, were, until volunteers met with them, completely unaware of the meaning of an education. Why should their child be educated? Who needs to read or write to till a field? On top of all of this uncertainty is the fact that a child has no time to work when he goes to school and uniforms and books cost money, something that these families are generally hard-pressed for anyway. With all of these questions and "costs" one might wonder how and why any of these children make it to school in the first place, much less pass. The answer, however, is not complicated and involves a simple process of sitting down with someone and discussing the situation. Even the poorest families, like Jangaiah's, come around when informed that an education has the potential to provide both them and their children with a more secure and fulfilling future.

Unlike the current protocol for MV Foundation's community mobilization and motivation, there was once a time when their ideas were still evolving. A popular view at the time, MV Foundation set up night schools as an informal parallel to government primary schools. The view was that children would go to schools if they did not interfere with their ability to make money for the family because without their income the family could not afford it. The problem is that this view not only justified and excused child labor, but it also proved an ineffective means of educating children. At the same time he was attending this night school, Jangaiah took his family's two cows for grazing, grazed cows for his neighbors, did housework, and took care of his siblings. With this type of schedule it's no wonder that he was unable to concentrate at night school. Nonetheless, his exposure to MV Foundation was the impetus behind attending a three day motivation camp in Kuntloor. He then enrolled into Paglipur Bridge Camp and within three months was prepared to enter 4th class.

His formal school career appeared destined for disaster after he fell ill at Ghatkesar Government School. After spending time in the hospital he went home, but his father, alarmed by the severity of his child's recent illness, refused to allow him back to school. Perhaps, his father thought, he would get sick again if he went back, and so began Jangaiah's work at home once more.

The persistence of the MV Foundation was a force to be reckoned with, however, and before long another volunteer showed up at their doorstep and convinced the parents to allow Jangaiah to attend Parigi Bridge Camp. Back at camp for the second time, Jangaiah prepared for and passed his 7th class state examination before entering government school in Hayathnagar. After tenth class he moved on to Hayathnagar Government Junior College and has studied there for the past two years, thereby bringing us back to the present.

All this narrates a very busy and eventful life for a young boy from Pasmamula whose parents and older brother never went to school and who spend their time working as agricultural laborers; this is far from the common experience. But the effect of Jangaiah's education is immediate and visible for all to see: his younger brother and sister are both studying in eighth class. His perseverance and the incessant attention of MV Foundation both contributed to his refusal to give up and demonstrated the feasibility of an education for his younger brother

and sister.

While waiting to retake his civics exam, Jangaiah is working as an office boy at the regional office of the Telugu Daily in Pasmamula. There he makes eleven hundred rupees a month, far less than minimum wage (nothing uncommon), of which he gives nine hundred to his parents and keeps two hundred for spending. Once again, however, he has a job that requires an education and can make connections that would be all but available should he have been forced to remain in the labor force as a child. ❧

## Case Study 7

### With Education There is no Fear of Life

Enter the first girl of my study. After five days of meeting with boys, I was beginning to wonder if all of MV Foundation's talk about focusing on the girl child was a big ghost story. Shobharani is a seventeen-year-old girl from the village of Kistapur in Doma mandal. She is from B C community. Her illiterate father is a farmer who works his own two acres of land, and, to compliment the family income, works three additional acres of someone else's land. She attended school until class 6 when her mother passed away, resulting in her father yanking her from school in order to help in domestic chores. It was not long, however, before an MV Foundation volunteer learned of Shobharani and asked her to go to Aloor camp in Ranga Reddy. Accordingly she acquiesced and after obtaining her father's permission began the process of catching up to her age bracket, eventually passing the 7th class state examination and enrolling in 8th class at Z.P. High School in Rajendranagar. She continued on there until being admitted to Malipet Government Junior College for Girls where she is currently studying BPC (Biology Physics Chemistry). In her first year, Shobharani passed with a score of 279 out of 440. She spends her nights in the government hostel and has one year left before completion.

As I asked her about future plans, seventeen-year-old student spoke of possibly pursuing a medical degree and voiced her apprehensions about funding. Without funding, or should she fail to pass the EAMCET (Engineering Agriculture Medical Common Entrance Test), there is the potential bachelorate in education and a career as a teacher. At the end of this discussion she slows down and forcefully states that more than anything else she desires to be independent, to be able to stand on her

own two feet, something simply unthinkable without hitting the books.

Initially, her father and brothers looked on her studies with skepticism, uncertain about what would come of it. More than anything, however, there was a fear of the unknown and a lack of faith in her ability. This is evident in the attitudes of her family post-acceptance to intermediate and in their gradual approval as her studies progressed. The doubt by her family was difficult for Shobharani, who says that her studies and the effort needed to keep her marks up proved far easier on her than the absence of encouragement from them. It was at times a lonely struggle, but she mentions that MV Foundation was a tremendous help, taking the place of her family with respect to her educational endeavors. They check up on her at the hostel and made sure that she was always prepared with supplies, books, and plenty of motivation. She adds, thoughtfully, that education will be a priority for her children.

Shobharani has displayed an incredible amount of perseverance in a life that is packed full of barriers. As a student in sixth class, she experienced the death of her mother and was forced to discontinue her education temporarily. I questioned her about this because during the interview she mentioned that her old mother and her new mother were both with her during our discussion. I was surprised to find out that she was speaking of the MV Foundation volunteers that have assisted her so dedicatedly throughout her schooling.

As for her thoughts on the benefits of education, a question that intimidated many of the students and is decidedly difficult for a teenager to reflect on, she spoke succinctly. She asserts that “education gives confidence in life...it teaches good behavior, conduct, and character. There is no fear of life. Without education,” she says, “there is always fear.” ❧

## Case Study 8

### Defying poverty.... to Serve the Community

Chandrakala is a classmate of Shobharani, with a life that differs in details but not in difficulty. At 17 years, she is the oldest child of illiterate and basket weaving (belonging to S T community) couple from Chandravancha village in Tandur. She has one younger sister currently in tenth class. Her family owns one and half acres of land which is worked by others for a split profit. With a subsistence income of roughly Rs

1,000 a month, officials and economists would be sad to know that this child is a living example of the inadequacies of their assessment that states poverty is a main reason for child labor. Their income is below the USD 1 per day accepted by international standards and far below the norm of USD 2 per day suggested by the World Bank in 2003. How then, does one explain her defiance of the “poverty argument” under traditional standards?

Before bridge camp, Chandrakala studied at the local school before her father became seriously ill. His heart trouble was complicated but his support for her education was such that he arranged for her to study at V.V. High School in Tandur, where she would stay at the S.T. hostel and be watched after in his absence. Throughout 6th and 7th class she lived in this hostel before moving to the MV Foundation camp in Tandur until tenth class, a camp which has since been closed.

She mentions that she made the move to MV Foundation’s camp because some of her other relatives began to voice opposition to her education. Among the reasons was the fear that it would be difficult to marry her, as an educated woman, to an uneducated man. Because of the prolific illiteracy, such men are few and far between in her community.

Chandrakala has never had to work, either before or after her education, because MV Foundation expressed the benefits of education to her mother and father before she reached working age. Child labor prevention at work. She is currently in 10+2, studying BiPC (Biology, Physics, and Chemistry), wherein she received 384 marks out of 440 during her first year. Perhaps one day she would like to be a gynecologist, citing knowledge that there is a lack of professionals in this field in India. Her interest lies not in money, but in doing service for the community.



## Case Study 9

### Long-term Benefits Vs. Temporary Inconveniences

From a family of agricultural laborers and belonging to S C community Sudhakar worked until the age of nine, grazing the two buffaloes his family owned and helping out with other chores required for the maintenance of their one acre of land. Both his parents are illiterate and work as agricultural labor. He was kept out of school and there was no indication that education was to be a part of his future until Srisailam, an MV Foundation volunteer, persuaded his parents that

an education was in his best interest. At the age of nine, Sudhakar began Piglipur Bridge Camp. He is now 22 years old.

This event signaled a change in his family's philosophy on work and education. His older sister was married at the age of sixteen, who is illiterate and put to domestic work. Initially, only his older brother was enrolled in school because his family did not think that it was advantageous or feasible for all of their children to attend. I say feasible, but a more accurate description of their feelings was that they simply thought it unprofitable. After Sudhakar enrolled in bridge camp, his family changed their plans of educating only his older brother and had his younger brother enrolled as well.

Currently, Sudhakar is the only one still pursuing his education, as his older brother failed out of tenth class and began working with the MacDowel whiskey company as a packer and his younger brother passed his S.S.C. (tenth class examination) and learned to be an electrician as an apprentice. His brother now works independently, and when I questioned Sudhakar as to why he is studying at ITI to obtain the same job his brother did without the schooling, he tells me that his brother was blinded by the possibility of quick money, exchanging certification and company employment for immediate spoils. Sudhakar is thinking more of his future and prefers to wait for his certificate, join a company, and secure a monthly wage. While his brother earns a salary of around Rs 2,200 a month, which he gives to his parents, my translator jokes that Sudhakar works in the rice killing department, meaning eats a lot but does not work. Still, he knows that the long-term benefits outweigh the temporary inconveniences and has now completed the two-year course, needing only to pass the examination in August.

After joining the bridge camp at Piglipur, he stayed there for four months and then entered 4th class at Gurukul High School in Ghatkesar where he stayed in the S.C. Welfare Hostel. He remained there until 9th class before moving to Maheswaram Government High School and completed 10th class. The impetus for the switch was the MV Foundation's concern about the quality of education at Gurukul, the lack of motivated teachers, and the difficulty in monitoring his progress. Although he did not originally pass the tenth class examination at his new school, his resolve was evident in his continued effort and success in passing the second time.

Sudhakar received help from his father and MV Foundation in

addition to the government scholarships for Scheduled Caste members. Although he is unable to determine what percentage of help was supplied by his father and MV Foundation, he states that it cost him around 1000 rupees for transportation and other costs, with the MV Foundation supporting him with notebooks, pens, and clothes. He is particular in mentioning that both his parents are now extremely supportive of his education.

I asked him how he felt about bridge camp, and he told me that after being a child labor the life of a student was “a whole new world.” It was both a source of excitement and friendship, and he mentions that the kindness of the teachers and the camaraderie developed with the other boys is something he will never forget. The teachers and the students ate in a large group and he developed deeper friendships than before bridge camp. ❧

## Case Study 10

### Working in Vacation for Education

From Vattinagulapally, eighteen-year-old Johan is the son of landless, uneducated parents (of the S C community) who has worked hard to earn a spot in Manjeera Private Degree College where he is studying his second year. He has one older brother and three younger brothers, all of whom completed at least partial schooling. Despite his parent’s lack of education, they developed ties with MV Foundation and became very motivated to enroll their children. As of now, his younger brothers are in various stages of their education, with one in 8th class, one in 9th class, and one studying his second year intermediate. His older brother studied up to 9th class before discontinuing his education and learning to drive a car, a skill that has found him employment driving for a wealthy man and earning around Rs 3,500 a month.

The connection between Johan’s family and MV Foundation, and also between his family and education, developed when his father was hired as a cook in MV Foundation’s bridge camp in Vattinagulapally. This resulted in his father keeping his older brother at the camp as a child and acquiring an understanding the significance of an education. When MV Foundation shifted its camp to Jannavada, Johan’s father was out of a job, but his desire to educate his family remained.

Shantha Sinha, Secretary-Trustee of the MV Foundation, helped



the process by taking Johan to the Jannavada Bridge Camp, where he stayed for six months before enrolling in 1st class at Darga Government School. He studied there until 5th class, after which he passed the common entrance exam and got admitted to Ibrahimpatnam Residential School. His studies improved steadily and he earned 422 marks out of 600 in his tenth class examinations, enough to get him a seat in a government residential college.

But things run less smoothly after this point. In addition to problems with funding for his continued education, there were other setbacks, such as getting all of his certificates in order for admission. The gap in his education, which lasted for a year, required Johan to learn and skill and secure some form of income. He spent his time learning to drive an auto, which provided just enough for him to get through the year. Finally, he was able to begin at Chilukur Government Junior College, near a temple that is a popular spot for those wishing to obtain a visa, where he stayed for the next two years in relative peace.

Yet again he is having trouble after completing junior college. Although he acquired admission to Manjeera Private Degree College in Patancheru, he does not have a hostel. He spends more time traveling than studying; the crowded, noisy buses do not allow for the chance to study. Because of this time restraint, he failed his first year. Although the school twenty-five kilometers from his home, a seemingly surmountable distance, the buses are often not on time and his bus pass is difficult for him to afford. His father is unable to provide much support, giving him around Rs 100 per year, so Johan pays the vast majority of the Rs 2000 fees with money earned from driving the auto during his vacations. Vacation is perhaps a misleading word, implying free time and freedom from work. This hardly describes a typical day during vacation for Johan, who works both nights and days to pay for his education. His desire for an education has also forced him to give up his favorite sport, badminton, in which he was on the regional team, and a host of other leisurely activities, but he is not one to complain. He has taken on these obstacles with cool resolve and determination.

So far he has made it to his second year, and, although the tide is running against him, his discipline and dedication have helped him establish what should be enough momentum to complete his degree. But not enough to give him complete freedom in his studies. His goal has always been to go to medical school, but he now understands that

achieving this goal will require more time, effort, and money than are possible for him. He is now taking courses in Botany, a subject that has always interested him, and scored well in the subject.

It's simply amazing that Johan has made it so far with so little. Why did he persevere? What caused him to continue pursuing his education against such tremendous odds? No one will ever be able to claim that this man did earn his education, and they will also never be able to take it away. He owes some gratitude to a few people from his village who earned their post-graduate degrees for providing an example for him to follow. He rubs his shaved head, which keeps him cool during the hot summer months, and tells me that they were his role models. With these men providing directions, MV Foundation provided the vehicle and fuel that have helped bring Johan so close to finally completing his goals. One day, Johan muses, perhaps he will have time to play badminton again. ❧

## Case Study 11

### Reversal of Mindset

Also from Vattinagulapally, B. Ravindar is an early product of MV Foundation's campaign. Like many of these children, both his parents are uneducated and work as agricultural laborers. The magnitude of this feat is not to be overlooked or taken for granted. Having the foresight to leave these children with a legacy of education is often a process that results from the reversal of an entire mindset, which entails disbelief, uncertainty, and a blind desire for the betterment of their child. His family is of S C community and owns only one acre of land and had to look past the immediate economic benefit of putting their children to work.

Although his younger sister is not interested in studying past tenth class, now learning to sew for a living, she has managed to finish her high school education, something that only twenty percent of all Indian children can claim.

B. Ravindar began his education in his native village when he was six and remained there until 3rd class. His uncle, Narsima, who is mandal-in-charge in Chevella for MV Foundation, took him to Maharest camp in Ranga Reddy for four years. He studied there until being admitted into sixth class at Shankarpally Government School where he lived in a hostel. However, the hostel was not available for 10th class, and B.

Ravindar moved back home while finishing high school in Jannawada.

After this, he joined Lal Bahadur Private Junior College in Mehdipatnam, completing his first year before finding himself unable to pass the second year exam. Still cognizant of the importance having an education provides, Ravindar felt that a technical training would provide him with a better career than simply calling it quits. One benefit of a tenth class education is the ability to enroll at ITI, something otherwise impossible.

He has since completed the two-year training course and has applied for jobs in various factories. Because the waiting list for these jobs can sometimes be up to two or three years, Ravindar, who is now 22 years old, is working for his B.A. in Computers via distance education at Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University where he is in his first year of three. He is confident that Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited, where he did his practical training, will have an opening for him. ❖

## Case Study 12

### Through Bridge Camp and Open University

E. Raju was present when I met with Johan and B. Ravindar and is also from Vattinagulapally. He is of the same age and community (S C). Another interesting commonality between these three is that their parents are all uneducated and own little or no land, yet none of them sent their children to work and all were motivated to send their children to school. But there are a number of factors that distinguish Raju's situation from anyone else that I have spoken to, and his story needs to be heard.

At the age of five, Raju began school but his attendance was erratic until moving in with his grandmother in Hayathnagar. He stayed there until 3rd class, but when his father bought two oxen he was shifted back home to watch over them. He spent a year away from education and was still tending the goats when MV Foundation opened up a bridge camp in Gandipet. As child laborer after child laborer began to put down their tools and pick up books, a movement was created that eventually grabbed hold of Raju.

Two years after joining bridge camp, Raju was ready to begin 6th class in Koheda, where he stayed in a hostel for a while. The school was too far from Vattinagulapally for his father's comfort, however, and soon he came to pick up Raju and bring him home. Although the initial plan

was to enroll him at a nearby school, a series of unfortunate and tragic events unfolded that prevented him from attending school thereafter and have hindered subsequent attempts to restart his education.

In order to switch, Raju was required to get a Transfer Certificate from Koheda to bring to his new school. After acquiring this certificate he began his trip home, but the weather was poor and soon he found himself drenched. As Johan and B. Ravindar try to suppress laughter in the background, Raju looks down and explains that the certificate was soaked in the rain, forcing him to move back in with his grandmother because no schools would admit him. As far as I am concerned, this is far from funny; it is a travesty that the education system is so unorganized that a lost certificate can effectively disrupt an education for years.

At his grandmother's house, Raju learned to drive an auto and spent the next three years earning a living taking people around town. Auto-driving is not a safe or secure form of income, as demonstrated by the trouble his brief stint in this field has caused him. On his way to lunch one day, Raju met with an accident in his auto and severely damaged his right arm. He was admitted into Nizam Institute of Medical Sciences but despite careful and thorough treatment his arm continues to trouble him. The loss of feeling in his right hand is compounded by nerve damage that inhibits movement, and none of the treatment at Nizam or by his local doctors has been able to improve the condition.

Raju spent all of this time out of school and it was not until last year that, at the age of twenty, he appeared for 7th class. What is particularly disheartening about this entire situation is that the inadequacies of the system, the inability to reproduce a simple document, set into motion a series of events that now find Raju finally beginning to resume his education at the age of twenty-two. And if the difficulties of recommencing his education at this age are not enough, throw in a critically injured right arm.

Knowing that he is not fit for physical labor, Raju has been studying with the help of his uncle in order to pass the tenth class examination next year. Money has been a problem which has kept him from hiring a private tutor, but his uncle got his bachelorate and his masters in commerce, qualifying him to help. The main reason he is studying privately is rather obvious, he is too old to be sitting in class with children far younger. He mentions that he will apply to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University eventually, so he can study at home. ❧

## Case Study 13

### Education Prevents Early Marriage

Maibamma comes from a relatively small family of S C community, with one younger sister and an older brother. Her brother completed 10th class before beginning work in a general store, while her younger sister has just started 1st class. Her mother and father are landless agricultural laborers who never went to school and working for daily wages of Rs 25 and 50, respectively.

Until she was eleven, Maibamma never attended school of any kind, nor did she consider it likely. She crossed seeds at a cottonseed farm for eight hours a day, exploited because of her young age and the low cost of employing her. Her daily salary was fifteen rupees a day.

When MV Foundation found her, her life was devoid of aspirations that extended beyond survival, with no concept of dreams or improving her lot. Discussions with her parents about an education resulted in her entering Aloor at the age of eleven. There she learned the basics required to enter school, an intensive process that readied her to enter 8th class directly a few months later.

She stayed at Kanya Patashala in Kandur, where she completed her high school education. She scored 350 out of 600 in tenth class, well above the minimum to pass and remarkable for a child with one-fourth the education of her classmates. This is both a result of her concentration towards her studies and the success of the MV Foundation teachers. Discontinuing her education was never an option for Maibamma after tenth class and she has no intentions of quitting anywhere short of acquiring a degree in Commerce. In her second year at Kodavanti Venkat Rangaiah Junior College, the time is approaching when her determination will be tested, both mentally and monetarily. At the moment she lives in the S.C. hostel at her school, nearly one hundred kilometers from home. Government scholarships have helped her afford junior college, but a considerable burden still rests on her shoulders when examination fees and other expenses arise. She knows that the odds are against her and that people are likely to simply respond, "I told you so," if she is unable to complete her dreams, but instead of making her indifferent their cynicism has inspired her. She cites an awareness that she is blazing a trail for others to follow, but more than anything else she simply wants what she is entitled to: an education

and the ability to choose her path in life.

With parents making a combined daily salary of seventy-five rupees, her story challenges expectations and traditional logic. If poverty dictates child labor, then how is it that she has made it to her second year in intermediate without having to work, at the very least, during school? A number of phenomena are at play here. Her parents have shown a desire to keep her in school rather than force her to supplement the family income. Although there are innumerable cases to the contrary, the education system has in this case shown that it can work. I asked her if her parents pressurise her to come back and work or get married. Their response indicates another spin-off benefit of MV Foundation's operation. The importance of her education transcends the payment she would receive from work and, perhaps just as important, it has prevented her from marrying at a young age. They are in no hurry to find her a husband and are fully content to wait for her to complete studies. She recently attended the weddings of two friends of hers from Nancharla who stopped their schooling, a clear sign that her fate would be no different if her studies ended.

None of this suggests that her life is easy, but it does give her hope. She skipped college today so that we could meet and tells me that trips to the city are very rare. She has never seen a movie at a theatre and only comes to the city for festivals. When I ask about the food at the hostel she is staying at she breaks out into a smile that quickly turns to a cringe. "Edible," she replies simply, responding in a way that anyone eating food provided at hostel might. Although the process of translation can be tedious at times, I find it remarkable that the majority of the time the process goes very smoothly. Maibamma responds quickly and sits up straight throughout our discussion, her voice loud and confident. Her bright eyes maintain eye contact while she is speaking and yet there is an ease in her demeanor that one would not expect from a child who spent her childhood in the sun crossing seeds for peanuts. This poise and self-confidence, without doubt, can be attributed to an acknowledgment of her own abilities realized through education. ✕

## Case Study 14

### Gradual Built up of Enthusiasm

K. Lakshmi comes from a background of illiteracy, her uneducated parents making their living off the two acres of land they own. She was

born in Ananthagiri and attended government primary school there until 5th class, shortly after her sister was born. For a while, even when she attended class she had her little sister in tow and was unable to concentrate on her studies. Eventually, she was forced to drop out of school, staying home to watch after her younger sister because it was not possible to take her along anymore. In addition to helping with her sister, and her younger brother when he was born, she also found herself with a good bit of free time. But free time does not stay thatway long, and as can be expected of children out of school she began to work as a child laborer. She spent six or seven months after dropping out weeding fields for twelve rupees a day. Her case supports the decision of MV Foundation to treat any child out of school as a child laborer, because quite honestly they are.

A relative of K. Lakshmi began teaching at the bridge camp in Aloor and counseled her family about the benefits of sending Lakshmi there. She was able to convince Lakshmi's parents to let her go and went to Ananthagiri to get her. After spending a year at Aloor, she enrolled directly into 8th class at Kanya Patasala Government School. She stayed there through tenth class, scraping through her final examinations with a 286 out of 600.

She is now 17 years and successfully passed her first year with an impressive score of 225 out of 440 in BiPC (Biology, Physics, and Chemistry) from Kodavanti Venkat Rangaiah Junior College, where. It should be noted that her marks in intermediate were significantly higher than high school despite taking the most difficult subjects. She says that it is much easier to study and perform well without having to divert so much attention to working, and she also attributes the better grades to superior teaching at KVR. These teachers seem to be genuinely concerned and often take time to help students in subjects that are giving them trouble. As a result, her parents have become more enthusiastic about her studies and have ceased to request she return to get married. ❖

## Case Study 15

### Higher Studies Earn Respect

Rameshbabu tended 25 goats and he also did agricultural work on their own land when he was a young boy. The family did not take a long time to decide to send Rameshbabu to a bridge course camp when they were told about it. The father had studied up to the 6th class and

had an idea of the value of education. The eldest son is already attending school. After Rameshbabu went to the camp, the youngest daughter was also sent to school. The other daughters were already married and had moved to the houses of their in-laws.

Because Rameshbabu had not attended school from the beginning, he had to study more to be able to write the 7th class exam. He first stayed 6 months in the Kothbaspally camp and after that he moved to the long-term camp in Gandipet. He was very happy in the camp and looked forward to the day that he would be going to a government school. Rameshbabu stayed in a SC Boys Hostel from the 8th to the 10th class. His family started to encourage him to study more. Everyone in the family became excited that Rameshbabu had the possibility of going beyond the 10th class. They started to protect him by seeing to it that he did not do any extra work. Many changes happened in the family in terms of improving the quality of life and realizing the value of it. Earlier they would only eat 2 times in a day. Now they would eat 3 to 4 times and with more vegetables. The parents bought better clothes and footwear for their children. Also his younger sister was sent to school and the mother made sure that she had enough time to study. The wives of the two elder sons took over some of the household work. Rameshbabu observed also that his parents worked more hours on the land as well as in the house. The time for work was better planned and not wasted. Earlier the parents would get up at 6 am but gradually this timing shifted to 4 am.

His brother and father supported him financially for the Intermediate Course. Besides the admission and examination fees, money was needed for travelling the 12 kilometres between Malkapur village and the College in Tandur. His father paid him Rs 100 every month and paid his admission fee. His brother paid his tuition fees to the amount of Rs 800. His brother who works in a stone quarry was also happy to support Rameshbabu. Rameshbabu got 250 marks out of 500 in the first year of the Intermediate Course and 300 marks out of 500 marks in the second year, after repeating the examination in one subject.

After he finished Junior College, the family sat together to discuss if it was financially possible to let Rameshbabu study to degree level. Rameshbabu understood that the financial pressures on the family would be too much. He settled the discussion by offering to get a job and this would ease the financial burden. The family accepted the offer.



Rameshbabu applied for a seat in the People's Degree College. It took 3 months for his admission to come through. He had applied late due to his repeat examination in the second year of the Intermediate Course. There were 10 seats available and 42 students had applied. The College did not know to whom to give these seats. Rameshbabu spent 3 months going back and forth to the College, he wrote letters to the Municipal Chairman and the local MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly) requesting them to help him obtain a seat. Nothing helped his case. Only after Rameshbabu paid Rs 1000 he got the admission. He and his family felt happy that they got the seat but they did not like the fact that it took 3 months to achieve and that it only came through in the end by paying bribe money.

In the first year of the Degree College, Rameshbabu worked the nightshift from 10 pm to 6 am cutting stones in a stone quarry in Malkapur. He did this job 7 days a week for the first year of the Degree College. He earned Rs 3000 rupees per month. His daily schedule was very tough during that year. After his work in the cement factory, he went home and had breakfast and a bath from 6 am to 8 am. Then he studied from 8 to 9.30 am and went to the College. The College hours were from 9.30 am to 4 pm and he rushed home after the classes were over. Rameshbabu slept during the daytime from 4 to 9 pm. After he got up he would prepare himself again to go to work in the cement factory. Because of this work, Rameshbabu was able to pay Rs 2500 out of the total amount of Rs 3600 required for admission to the Degree College. His father paid the remaining Rs 1100 as well as Rs 450 for the examination fee.

Despite this exhausting schedule, Rameshbabu still got 300 marks out of 500 in the first year. The subjects he had chosen were History, Public Administration, Political Science, Telugu and English. The attendance of the teacher of Political Science was very irregular so he did not get very good marks in that subject. Rameshbabu is at present studying in second year. He has already paid Rs 2000 rupees in installments for the second year fee and his father will pay the remainder. Because Rameshbabu got good results, his brother felt even more strongly about the need to support him. The family decided that Rameshbabu should quit his job in the night hours. Earlier his neighbours would have been against such a decision when they heard of it but they had also changed their views in favour of continuing in education.

Rameshbabu observes that he receives more respect in the village due to his higher studies. Village elders no longer give orders but advice instead. He has also noticed a change in the language people in the village use to address him. Among his best friends is Prabhakar Reddy who is from the Other Castes. Rameshbabu often visits their house in the village, sits and eats with Prabhakar's parents, something that would have been impossible in the days when he was a goat herder. His friends are from all castes and because they are all equally educated, these lines of separation disappear, he says. The education he has received has made him more sensitive to the needs of poor families and he wants to help them. He has helped 5 boys from his village to write the 10th class exams directly. He gave them tuition and moral support. All these 5 boys passed the exams and are now studying in the first year Intermediate.

After finishing degree college, Rameshbabu wants to study law and become a lawyer. He became a little shy when I asked him about his marriage and then he stated with pride that he would marry a girl with an education equal to his. His family is very proud of Rameshbabu. At the end of the interview, he said that his father had spoken about the transformation of the entire family due to his education in a village youth meeting. His father narrated the entire story of how Rameshbabu and the family changed into an educated family. He spoke out strongly against any child being sent to work. The village responded with cheers and applause. ❧



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