

“Education is an important ally in our shared battle, for advancing the lives of those that have only known poverty and injustice”

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Introduction

Education is the route out of poverty for many children. It gives them a chance to gain the knowledge and skills needed to improve their lives. However, millions of children in rural India never see the inside of a classroom.

For many families, the long-term benefits of sending their children to school are outweighed by the immediate need to send them to work or keep them at home to help with chores.

Children miss out on school because their families need them to earn money but by sacrificing their education, they become trapped in a cycle of poverty. For

us, education is a vital human right and plays a key role in human, social, and economic development. Through our work we find that education is one of the most important investments a country can make in its people and its future. Investing in quality childhood education brings the highest returns from individuals, societies, countries and is crucial to lifelong success.

That's why we have dedicated this Report to education, to highlight the difference our work has made to the lives of some of the poorest children in rural India. All of them, some thirteen years ago were facing a life of abject poverty, no opportunity

and a future of menial work at best. We want to bring you closer to the projects, people and places that are central to our work. Across each of the three stories in this Report, there's a thread of common humanity; ordinary young people striving to overcome adversity that otherwise would not be possible.

We hope that you find the stories of Gowsalya, Aravindh and Kanchana as encouraging and inspiring as we do.

The effects of poverty on education

Children born or raised in poverty face a number of disadvantages, most evidently in education. Poverty reduces a child's readiness for school because it leads to; poor physical health, limited motor skills, diminishes a child's ability to concentrate and remember information, reduces attentiveness, curiosity and motivation.

This is compounded further by the fact that the neighbourhoods in which they reside typically lack proper sanitation, safe drinking water or systematic rubbish collection; there is usually a severe shortage of space inside the houses where the children live and no public spaces dedicated to their use. However that does not mean that these children have no childhood, only a different kind of childhood that sees them playing on rough, uneven ground, taking on multiple roles in everyday life and sharing responsibilities with adults in domestic and public spaces in the community.

Through our work, we find that the most severe effects of poverty in India is that poor children enter school with this 'readiness' gap, and it grows as they get older. Children feel alienated from society; suffer insecurities because of their socio-economic status; fear the consequences of their poverty; endure feelings of powerlessness and are angry at society's inability to aid in their struggles.

Children from lower-income families are more likely than students from wealthier backgrounds to have lower test scores and they are at higher risk of dropping out of school. Those who complete high school are less likely to attend college than students from higher-income families. For some children, the effects of poverty on education present unique challenges in breaking the cycle of generational poverty and reduce their chances of leading rewarding, productive lives.



The Context

Despite India's emergence as an economic powerhouse on the global stage, the contrast between rich and poor is profound. Very little international aid or corporate funding trickles down to marginalised communities in India.

287 million or 37% of the world's illiterate people, are Indian according to UNESCO.

While education is every child's basic right, the caste system, grinding poverty, deprivation, population growth and natural catastrophes are depriving many children in India, of a world of books and learning.

While 22% of Indians fall below the poverty line, it has been estimated that more than half of the nation's population lacks even basic literacy skills. There is a huge increase in parental illiteracy and their lack of willpower to become literate. Many rural children enrolled are thus first generation learners, who come from illiterate families and are having to struggle alone with school life, lacking any parental advice or guidance.

This is further exacerbated by the rapidly growing population, shortages of teachers, books, basic facilities and insufficient public funds to cover education.

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The plight of the Dalits

More than one-sixth of India's population, some 160 million people, live a precarious existence, shunned by much of society because of their rank as "untouchables" or Dalits—literally meaning "broken" people at the bottom of India's caste system. Dalits are discriminated against, denied access to land, forced to work in degrading conditions and routinely abused at the hands of the Police and higher-caste communities that enjoy the state's protection. In what has been called India's "hidden apartheid" entire villages in many Indian states remain completely segregated by caste.

Discrimination against Dalits in the educational system is widespread in India. Alienation, social exclusion and physical abuse, transcend all levels of education, from primary education to University.

Legislation on this area is limited and measures that have been taken are often inadequately implemented or policed.

Illiteracy and drop-out rates among Dalits are very high, as overt discrimination and abuse that Dalit children face in schools is often so stigmatising that they are forced to drop out of school. One of the main issues is the discriminatory practices conducted by some teachers, which includes corporal punishment, denial of access to school water supplies, segregation in class rooms and forcing Dalit children to perform manual scavenging on and around school premises.

In addition, Dalit children face discriminatory attitudes from fellow students and the community as a whole, in particular from higher caste

members who perceive education for Dalits as a threat to village hierarchies and power relations.

National legislation and constitutional protection serve only to mask the social realities of discrimination and violence faced by Dalits. Intolerance, prejudice and harassment towards Dalits are equally prevalent across wider society and as such in extreme cases, a disproportionate number of Dalits commit suicide each year in India.

Therefore our work centres on improving the life opportunities of people that belong to these communities and in particular children. **Our ultimate goal is to move these children from a life of poverty, to a future with opportunity.**

What is the cycle of poverty?

The cycle of poverty is about more than a simple lack of resources. It's a complex issue that requires digging a little deeper for sustainable solutions. That's why Kamla Foundation works alongside communities to empower families, build their resilience and lift them out of poverty – for good.

The cycle of poverty begins when a child is born into a poor family. These families often have limited or no resources to create opportunities to advance themselves, which leaves them stuck in the poverty trap. On paper, the cycle of poverty has been defined as a phenomenon where poor families become impoverished for at least three generations.

Children are most affected by the cycle of poverty. They are dependent on their guardians and therefore can't pull themselves out of poverty because of

their young age and lack of resources. Children born into a Dalit family are more likely to experience:

- Entrenched caste system
- Grinding poverty
- Inadequate health care and malnutrition
- Illness due to unsafe water and poor sanitation
- Lack of access to education
- Gender discrimination
- Overcrowded schools
- Lack of committed or trained teachers and inadequate teaching equipment
- Poor transport provision – many children have to walk miles, to reach schools



Breaking the cycle of poverty

One of the biggest contributors to ending poverty is ensuring children have an education. For any child, education can open doors to the future that would otherwise be locked tight. Children who are not in school are at greater risk of exploitation and early marriage. They're on track for a much lower income once they grow up. This limits the future for their own children, thus repeating the cycle of poverty, generation after generation.

However, even the most basic education, reading, writing and arithmetic can open doors to futures that would otherwise be shut.

Adults with even a basic education are better equipped to run a business – for example, to keep accurate records and to secure loans to expand their ventures. They can read correspondence from potential business partners and write responses. Moreover, girls who stay in school are less likely to marry early, contributing to their overall health and well-being. They are more likely to have fewer children, can more effectively teach their children to help lift an entire generation.

Through our work over the last thirteen years, we have been committed to breaking this 'cycle of

poverty' in the regions where we operate in rural India. We have worked tirelessly with the Dalit community, providing skills for life to children who historically have had very few opportunities to better themselves. We firmly believe that in the realm of development, there is nothing else that has as many short and long term benefits as increasing education for all.

In answer to the famous Mahatma Gandhi Quote "Be the change that you wish to see in the world.".....we have become that change today! The following stories provide you with highlights of our 'change makers'. All three narratives that you are about to read, were beneficiaries of our child sponsorship programme.

As always, we are extremely grateful to all our supporters, donors and partners in India, whose efforts are invaluable and enable us to continue to develop the stories that enrich the following pages.



Meet Gowsalya



Despite fighting grinding poverty Gowsalya always aspired to go to school and receive an education. However this remained a distant dream until the Foundation's intervention.

Gowsalya was born into abject poverty in a small village in the state of Tamil Nadu, south India. She lived with her two younger brothers and widowed mother Amirtham. Her father tragically died of tuberculosis at a very young age. To support the family, her mother worked in a quarry receiving very little by way of a daily wage. Gowsalya's future looked extremely bleak and a life time of servitude was all that she could look forward to.

Gowsalya wanted to work in the care profession, with the aspiration of qualifying as a Nurse. This was in part due to seeing first-hand the adverse experience the family endured during her father's illness. Coming from a poor background and not receiving any medical support or advice she felt was totally unjust. Gowsalya was only a child and she remembered thinking, if only her Father had received proper medical treatment with good nursing care, he would have survived but he didn't and tragically died. That's when she started thinking about entering into the medical profession and to help the most vulnerable like her father, so that they can receive the care and treatment they fully deserve, regardless of caste and status.

All this took place because of the perceived low standing of the family, adding to the fact they were extremely poor exacerbated the family's plight. Like most of the villagers in the locality they were not able to access medical facilities purely because of their status. This experience haunted Gowsalya and she made a pledge to her Father that she will serve the poor in whatever capacity before he died. This was her way of ensuring no other poor villager endures the same fate as her Father.

At this low point in her life, our intervention proved timely and Gowsalya excelled at school with the Foundation meeting all costs related to her schooling from Primary to University. This enabled Gowsalya to concentrate on her studies and not worry about finances. She successfully went onto College and then to University to study for a BSc in Nursing.

Gowsalya relished University life and in between her studies, she helped out at an elderly people's home on a weekly basis. Providing comfort and solace to people entering the twilight of their lives was a life changing experience for her.

Gowsalya studied Nursing at the Mount Zion College of Nursing in the city of Pudukkottai. The course lasted four and half years and she successfully gained her degree in Nursing in 2018.



A very proud moment - Gowsalya receiving her degree

After graduation Gowsalya was recruited as a Staff Nurse and now works for a leading hospital in Chennai. In her spare time she is a mentor in her village and helps counsel and support vulnerable children and their families and champions the importance of education.



Gowsalya (right) now practices as a Nurse

Meet Aravindh



Aravindh lives in a remote hamlet of Sirukappatti, the nearest town is a distance of 12 kms in the State of Tamil Nadu south India. In his home region there is very little infrastructure, with no roads and only a dirt track leading up to his mud brick house.

Aravindh belongs to one of the lowest castes recognised by the Indian Government, the Valaiyars caste. Notable attributes of the hamlet are high levels of illiteracy, child labour and child marriages. Occupation, if extremely fortunate, is seasonal agricultural labour.

Aravindh was very young when his father died of a protracted mental illness, leaving his mother a widow at the young age of 35. He lives with his sister Sangeetha and mother, in a very small dilapidated dwelling. His mother Subbu is illiterate and earns a living as a seasonal agricultural labourer. His sister Sangeetha, was also a beneficiary of the child sponsorship programme. We supported her schooling through to College. After successfully gaining a Diploma in Nursing, she now works as a Nurse in a local hospital.

Thirteen years ago, both brother and sister were breaking rocks with their bare hands in a local quarry, (to help support their widowed mother) and were destined to a life of drudgery and bonded labour.



Aravindh at University

Through our intervention, we have helped to turn the siblings' lives around.

When Aravindh started school, his aspiration was to become a Mechanical Engineer. He excelled at School and was accepted to study B.Eng. Mechanical Engineering at MIET Engineering College in the City of Thiruchirappalli.

For over thirteen years we guided and counselled Aravindh (and his sister), assigned a Mentor and met all costs related to his schooling from Primary School through to University. Aravindh, rigorously applied himself to his studies combining academic life with extra-curricular activities. He excelled in both and achieved a first class degree in 2019!

Prior to his graduation, he participated in a number of Campus interviews with prospective Corporates and was offered two positions before sitting his finals. He accepted a technical post with a leading company in Chennai and has relocated to the city. A fantastic achievement and as a result of his new position Aravindh can now support his mother and is a role model and mentor for other children in the village.

We are delighted to have helped make Aravindh's dream a reality, moving him from a life of poverty to a future with opportunity. He now acts as an Ambassador for our work and mentors and inspires other children who find themselves in a similar predicament.



Aravindh graduating

Meet Kanchana



Kanchana belongs to a low caste community, living with her widowed mother. They live in a tiny 'lean to' dwelling (measuring about 40 square feet) which is situated at the end of a row of houses in a desperately poor region of rural India. Her mother, works as a labourer in the construction industry, providing the basics for the two of them to survive.

Kanchana's father died of a chronic illness when she was just six years of age. Since then her mother became the sole bread winner and worked as a domestic worker. Due to the huge stress of their situation, her mother developed a habit of chewing tobacco by placing a portion of it between the cheek and gum or upper lip teeth and constantly chewing. Unlike dipping tobacco, it is not ground and has to be manually crushed with the teeth to release flavour and nicotine. People start out for many reasons, but ultimately, they end up continuing their use because they become addicted. Harmful effects include; heart disease, high blood pressure and an increased risk of heart attack and stroke. In addition to their predicament Kanchana is constantly worried about her mother's health due to this addiction.

The Foundation's intervention has helped improve their well-being and general situation. We set up Kanchana's mother with a small micro enterprise thus enabling her to provide a decent income for the two of them.



Bhupendra, visiting Kanchana and her mother at their home

We then focused on Kanchana, supporting her through schooling for the best part of thirteen years. With our mentoring and guidance Kanchana thrived on education and proved to be an extremely able student. She selected to study Physics at University and excelled in a male dominated environment. We provided related support and counselling throughout her Schooling, College and University and took care of all costs related for her studies.

In 2018 Kanchana obtained a degree in BSc Physics from a leading University in South India. Not only did Kanchana become the first person from her wider family to attend schooling but also the first to receive a University degree from her entire collection of villages. She has smashed many glass ceilings and is seen as an inspirational role model in the wider community where she

resides. She is now on a mission to campaign for those children who are not in education.

Through this programme, we are achieving our ultimate goal, moving the poorest children from a life of poverty, to a future with opportunity. One of the legacies of this work is that we are creating Community Ambassadors who lobby and campaign for inclusive and quality education for all.



Kanchana receiving her degree

Our Impact

Understanding the impact of our work is vital to us. We do this by collecting stories, feedback and related evidence about the difference our work is making in communities across rural India. We also partner with Universities to get an external perspective on our impact. This helps us to keep improving what we do and to share what we are learning with others.

In particular, the value of our work is measured by evaluating how we're working: how our approaches have improved the lives of the most vulnerable; how we've improved our ways of working; what we can learn and how we can be even more effective in the future. We apply a greater emphasis on the breadth of impact - particularly the number of lives we have touched with our programming and depth of impact - looking at the nature of change in the lives of the most vulnerable.

Our hope for the future

Poverty is not hopelessness. It is mired in a sense of futility that spreads among those people barely keeping afloat. This bleak surrender is part of what keeps them bonded to poverty, numbing them and us (those in far better circumstances) until it seems there will never be an end to it. Except there can be an end. There is hope and through our work we are providing significant opportunities. We are helping to restore hope and provide measurable, transformational change that can eventually eliminate grinding poverty in the areas we operate. We are doing this by building bridges, moving beyond our role of facilitating, enabling and grant giving.

Our work engages children before they enter the school system, by supporting parents, through early childhood

development programmes. Our literacy boost effort continues to reach the most marginalised children in rural India, supporting them to learn the basic literacy and numeracy skills needed to survive in the 21st century. We are working to provide quality education, supporting children living in some of the most deprived rural regions because we believe that access to a quality education is a fundamental human right.

We find that education is crucial to reducing poverty, boosting economic growth and increasing income. In particular, it increases a person's chances of having a healthy life, reduces maternal deaths, reduces population growth and helps combat diseases. At the same time, we must recognise that action by the Indian Government alone is insufficient. The approach

we advocate must be one of genuine collaboration between the state, wider civil society, including the private sector.

With our support, many children have already been given a chance at a better future but there is a long way to go until every child gets the education that is their right. We find that education is an important ally in our shared battle for advancing the lives of those that have only known poverty and injustice - one that will make society much richer when won.

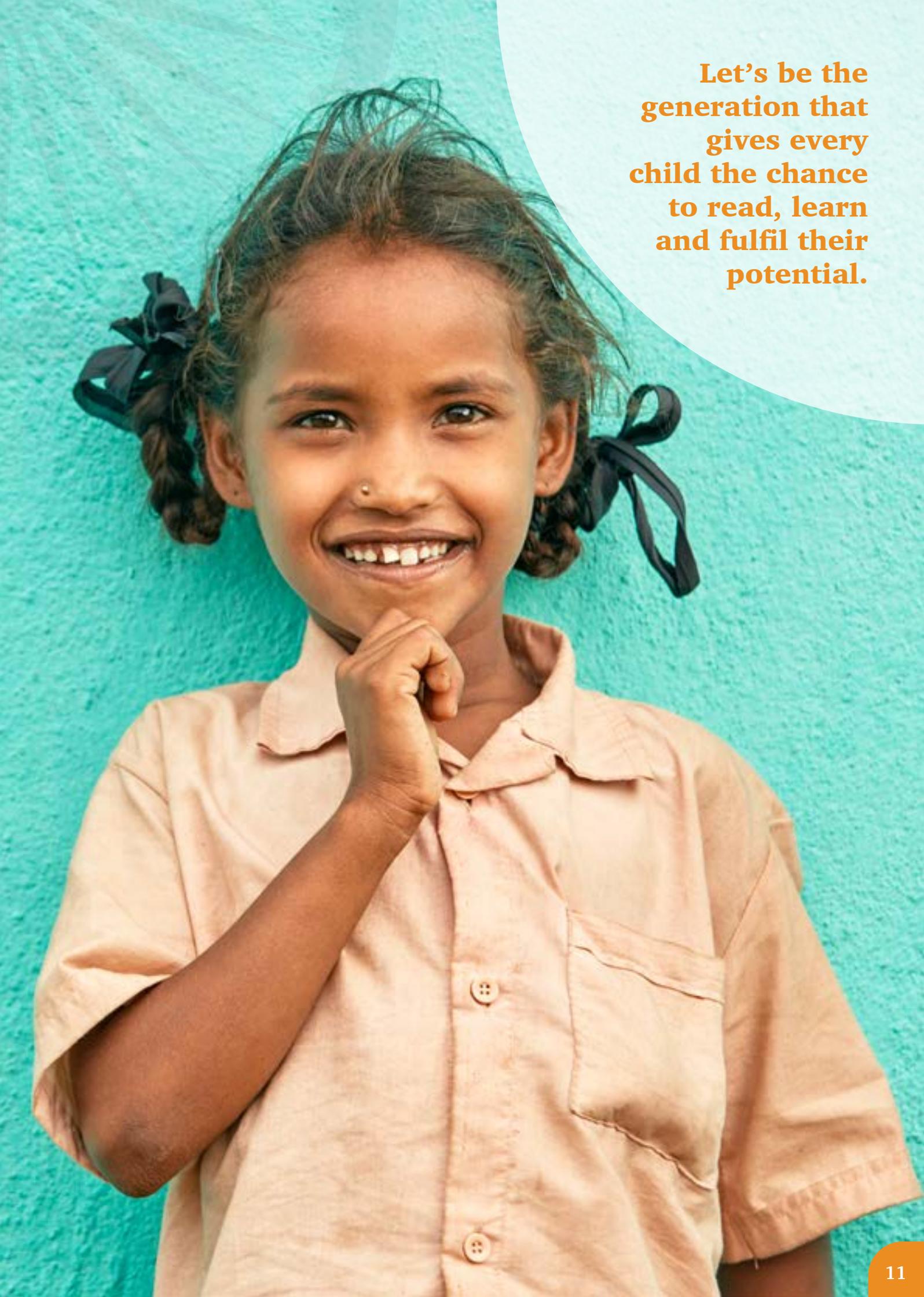
Let's be the generation that gives every child the chance to read, learn and fulfil their potential

We can get there - if we work together.

Bhupendra Mistry

Founding Director
KAMLA FOUNDATION

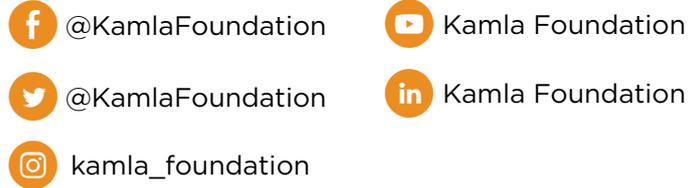
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Kamla Foundation is a registered charity based in the UK helping vulnerable communities in India, develop their capacity to meet basic needs and create solutions to poverty and injustice.