

## Shanmuka Priya's story: A profile from Young Lives in India



**Shanmuka Priya lives in a village with her parents and her little brother, Prashant. She is 13 and in Grade 8. Her family has moved to a new house and she has recently started at high school, which she much prefers to her previous school. Her mother cannot read or write and her father left school when he was 10. Shanmuka Priya says she wants to become a teacher.**

Shanmuka Priya feels that she has grown up a lot since last time Young Lives researchers visited.

*“When I was a child, I used to play a lot, dance, not study properly. I didn’t eat well, I used to fall ill frequently. I had only two or three friends. That has all changed now I have grown up. We all play together, study together and sing together. I eat regularly. It’s more about studying now I am in high school.”*

She is particularly happy because “the teachers do not beat the students like they did in the old school. Those [teachers] who come from other places don’t beat us because they know that the Government would punish them.”

She says the old school

*“was small and untidy but the high school is peaceful and good. We had no kitchen in [the old] school. They used to cook outside and so when it rained, we got no food. We’d have to go home. Now that we have a kitchen, there is no need to go home because we can eat here.”*

Despite the new kitchen, her one complaint about the school is the food:

*“They don’t cook properly: the rice is watery and full of stones. They don’t remove the egg shells. One day, they didn’t wash the rice and it smelt awful. We all went home for lunch and the rice was left untouched.”*

She doesn’t think that the problem has been solved, despite the boys complaining to a number of the adults.

Another thing she likes about the new school is that there are no noisy small children. Also, the school has just built separate latrines for girls and boys. They haven’t used them yet but this will mean the girls don’t have to go home when they want to use the toilet. The school bought some computers but they were stolen and have not been replaced.

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Shanmuka Priya says there have been improvements in the village too. There is a new road, a new canal and a railway line and the Government sends a tanker of water and has provided a tap for each street, although they still don't get water regularly.

*"When we call the authorities, they say 'We will do it now,' but they provide water for less than half an hour and [then] stop. We get enough water to drink but some families cannot manage all their domestic needs, like washing clothes."*

The most significant thing that has happened to her personally is that a month ago she had her first period: "I told my mother, then she told me that I had reached puberty. I was scared. Only two or three girls from my class have [had their period]."

Her mother said that she should stay at home for nine days and throw a party to celebrate. "I was given a separate plate, glass and a separate one of everything. They prepared *bakshalu* [sweets], and invited people, who brought dresses and other things." She was taken to the temple but otherwise was not allowed out of the house. She soon got fed up with staying in and she had exams, so she persuaded her mother to let her out after five days.

Shanmuka Priya complained that she had also missed school because her parents wanted her to work in the cotton fields during the harvest. In Grade 6 she missed school for more than two months. She didn't like this at all:

*"I hate the cotton fields. We have to go early in the morning and get back home only at 8 o'clock. It would be better to study. I wish there were no cotton farms and so no need for me to work. I miss lessons. I forget what I learnt."*

She is very clear about the importance of education:

*"We don't know what is going on around us if we aren't educated. Unless teachers tell us, we don't even know what's happening in the next village. Education is useful. Suppose an uneducated friend doesn't understand something and comes to me? If I am educated I can explain."*

She believes it is just as important for girls to be educated as boys:

*"Girls should study. Because after a girl gets married, her husband may say that she doesn't do household work properly and abuse her and beat her. If a girl's parents say that she shouldn't study then they're committing a mistake and a crime. Education is important."*

She complains that at her brother's age, "I used to sweep and do other small chores. My brother doesn't do those things. When I ask why, they say that he's a boy and because I am a girl, I have to do those things." She says it is the same for all her girlfriends.

Shanmuka Priya takes part in a number of group discussions, and in one of them the girls became very animated about how much they were harassed by the boys:

*"The girls study well in our village but their minds are full of the threat they see from boys. They are tormented and their spirits are dampened and they suffer a lot. This means they do not have self-confidence and are not able to do well. And this is why they give up their studies and drop out of school."*

She thinks that for this reason there should perhaps be separate boys' and girls' schools.

Despite her evident brightness and her enthusiasm for learning, when her parents had to choose whether she or her younger brother went to private school, they chose her brother. Her mother, who had no education herself and was married at 13, says:

*"Everyone around me said: 'Why educate a girl? It is a waste. It is better that you send your son. She is studying well where she is.' I wanted her to study but at that time we had financial problems. So we thought: 'At least educate one person.' It was difficult to educate both of them in an English-medium [school]."*

Will Shanmuka Priya continue with her education? "We will decide after Grade 10, based on her performance. After that we will do what [God] wishes. If she studies well then we will educate her till she says 'Enough.'"

Shanmuka Priya says she wants to be a teacher: "If I'm educated, I can get a job, go to different places and teach others."

*"I used to sweep and do other small chores. My brother doesn't do those things. When I ask why, they say that he's a boy and because I am a girl I have to do those things."*

Shanmuka Priya, age 13.

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## The growth of private education

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Shanmuka Priya is not the only bright girl in Andhra Pradesh whose family, when forced to choose, decided to send their son rather than their daughter to private school. The number of 'low-fee' private schools in India as a whole continues to rise, starting with kindergarten for 3-year-olds. It is not just the better-off who are opting for private education; many poor urban families and an increasing number of rural families are also choosing it.

The attraction of private schools for poor parents is directly related to aspirations. They hope that a child in private school will have a better education, higher social status and a better chance to have decent employment. The private schools offer English-medium teaching, which is not traditionally available in government schools. Parents are also voting with their feet, believing that government schools offer inferior education, and that teachers are frequently absent. This is despite the fact that often, teachers in government schools are better qualified and better paid than those in private schools.

In the Young Lives Older Cohort, attendance at government schools dropped from 72.4 per cent to 49.1 per cent between 2001 and 2009, while attendance at private schools increased from 22.6 per cent to 27.7 per cent. The figure for the Younger Cohort was much higher, with 44 per cent attending private school. These figures also show a widening gender gap. For the Older Cohort, it was only at the end of primary school that there were more boys than girls attending private schools, while for the Younger Cohort, a 9 per cent gap already existed by the age of 8 for the poorest rural children.

In Ethiopia, too, there is a small but increasing minority (15 per cent) of children from better-off families in urban areas attending private schools. Afework is one of these. In Peru, in 2006, only 4 per cent of the Older Cohort children were enrolled in private schools at the age of 12, but by 2013, when Younger Cohort children had reached the same age, it had risen to 12.5 per cent. Lupe goes to private school in Peru.

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**Sources:** Education and Learning: Preliminary Findings from the 2013 Young Lives Survey, Round 4 fact sheets for Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam, 2014; Emma Feeney with Gina Crivello (2015) How Gender Shapes Adolescence: Diverging Paths and Opportunities, Young Lives Policy Brief 22; Martin Woodhead et al. (2013) What Inequality Means for Children: Evidence from Young Lives, Young Lives Policy Paper; Martin Woodhead et al. (2012) 'Does Growth in Private Schooling Contribute to Education for All? Evidence from a Longitudinal, Two-cohort Study in Andhra Pradesh, India', International Journal of Educational Development.

## Country Context: India

India is home to 1.2 billion people, of whom 30 per cent are children. The country is fast becoming an economic superpower, predicted the world's third-largest economy by 2035. Life expectancy has more than doubled, literacy rates have quadrupled, and health conditions have improved. But huge disparities remain. The caste system still affects everyday life, despite quota systems for those whom the Government calls Scheduled Castes (otherwise known as Dalits or formerly 'Untouchables') and Scheduled Tribes (otherwise known as adivasis, India's indigenous peoples). More than 400 million people still live in poverty. And many of those who have recently escaped poverty are still highly vulnerable to falling back into it. Maternal and child mortality rates remain very high and millions of children are malnourished. While most children now go to primary school, the quality of education remains low. At secondary level, many school leavers do not have the knowledge and skills to compete in labour markets.

India will soon have the largest and youngest workforce the world has ever seen. At the same time, the country is in the midst of a massive wave of urbanisation, as some 10 million people, most of them young people, move to towns and cities each year in search of jobs and opportunity. Massive investments will be needed to create the jobs, housing, and infrastructure.

Young Lives children come from the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, in India. Salman lives in a densely populated slum area in Hyderabad. Ravi lives in a poor, drought-prone rural area in the Rayalaseema region, affected by Naxalite (communist guerrilla) movements. Harika, Sarada and Shanmuka Priya live in a very poor community of around 2,000 people in southern Telangana. Deepak lives in a coastal region with a population of around 5,000.

\*<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/india/overview>

## Towards A Better Future? Hopes and Fears from Young Lives

Young Lives is a unique international study which has been following the lives of 12,000 children in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam over the course of the Millennium Development Goals. As the world now moves on to the Sustainable Development Goals, attention has been drawn to the need for evidence and robust data to monitor progress at national level. The kind of data that Young Lives collects is rare in developing countries and so can be very useful for governments and international donors. The data build a story – and, more importantly, build evidence for change.

The profile presented here is one of 24 taken from our interviews with the children and young people. Each one is accompanied by the short description of a 'theme' that emerged from their interviews and which illustrates the issues that children and young people are having to contend with. These range from education and schooling, to inequality, health and illness, violence in school and at home, early marriage, migration, families' experiences of crises, government schemes to help poor communities, and children's views and experiences of what it is to be rich or poor.

The children and families who are participating in the Young Lives study willingly share with us a great deal of detailed personal information about their daily lives, and we have a responsibility to protect their confidentiality and ensure their identities remain protected. For this reason, the children's names have been changed here. The accompanying photos are of children to the children within our study.



### Acknowledgements and credits

This is an extract from our updated book of 24 profiles following the same children since 2007 – *Building a Better Future: Hopes and Fears from Young Lives*, written by Nikki van der Gaag and Caroline Knowles, and available to download from our website: [www.younglives.org.uk/content/publications](http://www.younglives.org.uk/content/publications).

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