



# Sarada's story

A profile from  
Young Lives in India

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when they face problems. It will change our  
society for the better."*

# Sarada's story

**Sarada is now 15. She has developed into a confident and outspoken young woman. She is determined to continue her studies and become a lawyer. She wants to make her own decisions in life, but this leads to conflict with her parents. The past few years have been very difficult for her and her family, as they have fallen into debt.**

Sarada lives with her father, mother, younger sister and stepbrother. Two of her older stepsisters and one stepbrother live in Mumbai. One sister is studying, and the other is married. Sarada's father also has another wife in Mumbai.

Sarada's family had been hoping to get a government grant under a housing scheme for a new house after their old one collapsed. This did not materialise so they took out a loan and have fallen heavily into debt.

As a result, Sarada and her siblings were taken out of school and sent to work in the cotton fields in order to pay off the debt. But Sarada became ill because her disability meant the work was too much for her. With the support of the self-help group for disabled people, her schoolteachers and her friend, Sarada lodged a complaint with the labour inspector against her parents and the landowner. As a result she was withdrawn from the work.

But her younger sister and older brother are still working on the cotton farm to clear the debt. So it is not surprising that there have been arguments between Sarada and her parents. In addition, she used to get a scholarship from the Government (for disabled children) which she used to give to her parents, but now she keeps the money for herself.

*"Since 9th grade, I do not obey my parents any more. I do what I want to do. If I feel like eating fritters, I get the ingredients and make them. I make chapattis for myself. On Sundays I get an egg. On festivals I bring good things for the house. Sometimes I buy pictures of gods. I also buy plates and glasses. My family members tell me off for wasting money. But I don't care what they say.*

*I know I spend a lot of money and I feel bad that I am not thinking of my parents' problems. Sometimes when my mother asks for money for tea and my father asks for beedis [cigarettes], I give them money."*

But she also thinks that her new confidence has to do with being educated. On one level, she says, her parents understand this: "They must realise that this is the age that I should be enjoying myself. Maybe that's why they let me have the freedom. I think they understand my pain, feelings and my ambitions much better now than before."

Last time we interviewed Sarada, she was 12 years old. She lives in a village and has been disabled since birth – though she can walk short distances, she has problems standing for any length of time. The family belongs to a low-caste community that washes clothes for a living.

She says she often argues with her father.

*“Sometimes my father says that I come home late on purpose to avoid doing the household chores. Class is over at 5.30 and it is 6 by the time we come home. Since there is no bus at that time, we all try to work out how to come home, because none of us have money to come in a taxi. When he accuses me of coming home late on purpose, the next day I do come home late on purpose.”*

In terms of her disability, she does not complain, but describes how it affects her life in a matter-of-fact way:

*“I cannot walk very far. Even when I walk from here to the bus stop, my leg hurts a lot. I keep telling myself that I will get used to the pain and I have to bear it. On Sundays if I go out walking, my leg starts to hurt a lot. Or if I lift the water pot too many times, or do the same work repetitively, it aches so much that I can't sleep at night.”*

On Saturdays, she goes to classes at the Disabled People's Association, Daroor Mandalam. She has been going there for three years. Sometimes she takes her non-disabled friends with her. She learns about disabled people's rights.

*“We have facilities in buses, trains, schools and hostels. Employment opportunities are also given to us. We can get loans to start a small shop or something like that.”*

**Are any jobs reserved for disabled people?**

*Yes. Disabled people who have finished intermediate education are given teaching jobs. They don't have to pay examination fees. They have special classes every Sunday. They don't have to pay college or hostel fees. They get blankets and clothes and books. They also receive scholarships.*

**How did you get all this information?**

*Our teacher at the association told us. The law says that disabled people have the right to all these facilities. He tells us about all these rights and motivates us to use them to improve ourselves.”*

The association is also a place where she can read newspapers.

*“I learn lots of new things by reading the newspaper. I learn what's happening in the world. For example, the American president came to India. They wrote about what he said, who he met and his wife's name. He met our president and said that India is developing fast and it is in the top place in many things and he likes India.”*

In the future, Sarada says she wants to become a lawyer, although she recognises that she is by no means at the top of her class. Last time we spoke to her, she said she wanted to become a judge, but then a man told her that judges believe what lawyers tell them so lawyers are the ones who can really see that justice is served.

*“My main ambition is to become a lawyer. I have been thinking about it since 8th grade. Even when girls accomplish great things, the world still treats women as slaves and looks down on them. People are not willing to educate them, saying: ‘Girls will get married so why should they be educated?’ If I become a lawyer, I can help women when they face problems. It will change our society for the better.”*

How do you know that women are facing discrimination?

*“I read it in the newspaper. I read that husbands falsely accuse their wives of various things and hit them. I also read that men get addicted to alcohol and destroy children’s lives. I always wonder who will stand up for the women who are suffering, especially tribal women. They are still being exploited. I thought, ‘If I become a lawyer, I could help at least few of them.’”*

But she is also worried that her family won’t let her go to college to study law. Sometimes, she says, she thinks about:

*“Severing all family relationships and going to a faraway place, staying in a hostel, and working hard to become a good lawyer. But other times I don’t feel like leaving my mother. And then I think about stopping my studies and staying with my mother. But if I do that, I cannot serve other people. I won’t be useful to the country. And I have to study just to support myself.”*

*“I learn lots of new things by reading the newspaper. I learn what’s happening in the world. For example, the American President came to India. He met our President and said ... that he likes India.”*

## The role of self-help groups

Sarada talked a lot about how much the Disabled People's Association had helped and supported her. Among other things, it enabled her to return to school, although her siblings had had to drop out to pay off the family debt. In Andhra Pradesh, there are over 700,000 self-help groups, funded by national and state-level government, non-governmental organisations and international donors, including the World Bank.

Our research shows positive effects for families who belong to such groups and have strong social networks. In Andhra Pradesh, children who live in households that don't belong to such groups are half as likely to be enrolled in school and 40 per cent less likely to have a healthy BMI for their age.

The Girl Child Protection Scheme, implemented by the Women and Child Welfare Department of Andhra Pradesh, is another way families can access support. The scheme is targeted at families with one or two daughters. Its primary aims are to eliminate prejudice and discrimination against girls, particularly through encouraging the enrolment of girls in school and trying to ensure they continue to the end of high school. It also aims to protect their rights, empower them socially and financially and eliminate negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls.

The scheme is open to families who have used family planning services, and whose total annual household income is below 20,000 rupees (about 370 dollars) in rural areas and 24,000 rupees (440 dollars) in urban ones. The state Government will deposit 5,000 rupees (90 dollars) in a bank account for eligible girls on birth, which can be accessed on completion of Grade 10 or when the child is 18.

Around 15 per cent of Young Lives households that have at least one girl child aged between 5 and 17 years old (not necessarily the Young Lives child) have benefited from financial support for her education through the scheme. This proportion is highest among the Scheduled Castes and lowest among the Other Castes, which probably reflects their relative economic status.

Little other research is available on the impact of the Girl Child Protection Scheme. Young Lives is well placed to help to evaluate its impact over time as the children grow up.

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**Sources:** S. Galab et al. (2011) *The Impact of Growth on Childhood Poverty in Andhra Pradesh: Initial Findings from India*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report; Kirrily Pells (2011) *Poverty and Gender Inequalities: Evidence from Young Lives*, Young Lives Policy Paper 3; Kirrily Pells (2011) *Poverty, Risk and Families' Responses: Evidence from Young Lives*, Young Lives Policy Paper 4.

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## Country context: India

India has a population of more than 1.2 billion people. It is a country of huge inequalities, with the second-largest number of billionaires in the world but also 25 per cent of the world's poor. It ranks 134 out of 187 countries in the United Nations Human Development Index.

Over the last five years, India has seen impressive economic growth. Even during the global recession in 2009, the economy grew at a rate of 7 per cent of GDP. But inflation is a big problem, especially for poor people.

- 76 per cent of the population lives on less than two dollars per day.
- Malnutrition is more common in India than in sub-Saharan Africa.
- More children under 5 die from preventable and treatable diseases than in any other country.

Many of India's inequalities are tied to gender and caste: women and girls still face multiple discrimination and India ranks 129th out of 187 in the United Nations Gender Inequality Index. The caste system, which dates back many thousands of years, is still extremely important in everyday life, with what the Government calls Scheduled Castes (otherwise known as *Dalits* or formerly 'untouchables') and Scheduled Tribes (otherwise known as *adivasis*, India's indigenous peoples) the most disadvantaged communities. This is despite the fact that discrimination on the basis of caste is now illegal, and various measures have been introduced to empower disadvantaged groups and give them better access to opportunities.

Andhra Pradesh, in south India, is its fifth-largest state and has a population of 84.6 million. It is still largely agricultural, although its capital, Hyderabad, is one of the leading centres of the technology revolution. The state was the role model for several new government initiatives during the 1990s to eliminate poverty and has made considerable progress on child development indicators since the mid-1990s.

- Rural poverty went down from 48 per cent in 1973/4 to 11 per cent in 2004/5.
- Unlike in the other Young Lives countries, poverty is higher in urban than in rural areas.
- Adult literacy went up from 61 per cent in 2001 to 67 per cent in 2011.
- But 76 per cent of men were literate compared with 60 per cent of women. And only 66 per cent of girls aged 6 to 17 attend school, compared with 77 per cent of boys.

**Sources:** [www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk); UNDP (2011) *Human Development Report*; S. Galab et al. (2011) *Impact of Growth on Childhood Poverty in Andhra Pradesh: Initial Findings from India*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report; UNICEF (2012) *State of the World's Children*.

Young Lives is a unique international study investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam. By following the lives of 12,000 children and young people over 15 years, we aim to improve understanding of the causes and consequences of childhood poverty and provide evidence to support effective policies for children.

The profile presented here is one of 24 taken from the interviews we did with the children individually and in groups. Each one is accompanied by a theme of some kind that emerged from the material and which illustrates the issues that children are having to contend with, but also gives a sense of the wider context of their lives. These range from education and schooling, to inequality, health and illness, violence in school and at home, early marriage, the effects of migration, families' experiences of crises, government schemes to help poor people, and children's views and experiences of what it is to be rich or poor.

The children and their 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 in similar situations to the children within our study sample.

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An International Study of Childhood Poverty