



Shanmuka Priya's story

A profile from
Young Lives in India

"Some people say that girls are just like boys and they should be educated well. Other say: 'since we can't benefit, why spend money on a girl's education?'"

Shanmuka Priya's father

Shanmuka Priya's story

Shanmuka Priya is 8 years old. She is a lively and communicative child. She learned to be independent at an early age. When she was about 5, her parents had to go and work in the fields for much of the day. They took her baby brother with them and left her at home. Sometimes she was looked after by her grandmother or a neighbour and sometimes she played with friends. But often she was alone.

Shanmuka Priya's family used to live in a big house with her grandfather, grandmother, uncle and aunt. But last year her parents argued with her grandparents and moved into a rented house. She says she does not like it.

"Before, we used to stay in a big house. The house was very clean and neat. Now this house is all messy. I don't like it at all."

Who is living in the old house?

"My grandmother and grandfather. We don't have any buffalos now. My chinna tata [grandfather's younger brother] took them."

Shanmuka Priya and her little brother both attended the village *anganwadi* (pre-school). When she started primary school, her mother was worried that the quality of the education was not good. But Shanmuka Priya says she likes to learn. She prefers some teachers to others. She says she doesn't like the male teachers because they hit the children: "Once I got hurt when the teacher hit me. I wrote in letters that were too small, so he hit me."

She explains how she protected her younger brother: "If I was not at school, somebody would hit him. He would come home and say: 'This boy hit me, or that boy hit me.' So I kicked them after the teacher went out."

In 2009 her parents decided to send Shanmuka Priya to a private school that teaches in English in a town about 15 kilometres away. But she only attended for four days. Her father says they missed her too much as she was away all day, and her mother says it was too expensive. It cost 5,000 rupees (95 dollars) a year.

So she is back in the local school and now in 4th grade, where she says she has to work much harder than before.

"Since coming to this class they give us more homework. In the 3rd class I used to finish it in a jiffy and then play."

And now?

"Now they give us more homework, I don't have time to play."

Who is helping you with your homework?

Shanmuka Priya did not feature in the first book of Young Lives children's stories, although we have been following her, like the other children, since 2002.

No one helps me. No one in my house knows how to write."

Shanmuka Priya's mother cannot read or write. She was married at 12 and had her daughter when she was 15, although her brothers were educated, and one is now in college. Shanmuka Priya's father attended school until he was 10, when he had to drop out to help his family. He has been doing agricultural work ever since.

Her mother notes that there has been a change in attitudes to education for both boys and girls since she was young.

"Earlier, people never used to send their children to school. Now even girls go. Everybody wants to be educated. What is so good about agriculture? There is hardly any reward for working so hard. I think only education is important; children can get a job and live happily when they grow up."

Her mother has noticed that Shanmuka Priya is working harder now.

"Her studies are better than last year. Now, when her father asks her questions about her lessons, she can answer them. Before, she used to say that she didn't know the answer. Her father says she has all the right answers and she is getting cleverer."

What do you think is the reason for her improvement?

Her teacher. Her teacher is teaching her well."

Shanmuka Priya says there are currently 58 children in her current class, but only 15 are girls. The class is divided into three groups: A, B and C. She is much exercised about the fact that she is only in Group B and that there is only one girl in the top group.

"Boys are in A group. I am a good student. But the teacher said there were no girls in A group so I had to go to B group."

What did you say?

I said: 'Why did you put me in B group? I am a good student.' He said: 'There are no girls in Group A.' I said: 'Pavitra is in Group A.' He said they were keeping her there for two days and then they were going to move her too."

Shanmuka Priya says the other thing that has changed is that she no longer plays with boys.

"I am afraid of them now, I don't know why."

Did someone tell you not to play with them?

My mother told me not to play with boys."

Her younger brother, Prashant, now goes to a private school. Her mother told Young Lives that most people in the village are not interested in girls staying on at school, but will make sure the boys attend because their sons will look after them when they are old, while girls leave for their husband's family.

Shanmuka Priya's parents say they want their son to go on to higher education:

"Shanmuka Priya is a girl; we won't give her higher education. And in the case of Prashant we will make him study as much as we can. We want our only son to get a good education."

We have up to 10th grade in the village school for Shanmuka Priya. We will see what happens after that.”

Her father says:

“Some people say that girls are just like boys and they should be educated well. And others say: ‘What are they going to do with higher education since they will be going to somebody else’s house?’ They also say: ‘Since we can’t benefit, why spend money on a girl’s education?’

But I want Shanmuka Priya to get a good education. We think that if she studies well, her life will be good. We know what it is like to work hard. Why should our children suffer like us? We want them to have a better life. We all like to see our children happy and comfortable. I hope our dreams come true.”

The rise in private education and its potential effect on gender equality

Andhra Pradesh has seen a huge rise in the private education system in the past few years. This appears to be driven by strong parental demand for services, which are often thought to be of better quality and likely to lead to better job prospects. This is especially because private schools typically teach in English, while government schools tend to teach in Telugu or the local language (with some schools teaching also in Urdu, which some parents like as the children are able to learn to read the Qu’ran).

This overall increase in children attending private school can also be seen among the Young Lives children. Private schooling of 8-year-olds increased from 24 per cent to 44 per cent between 2002 and 2009. In urban areas, the private sector is now a major provider of primary education, but even in rural areas, its growth has been considerable.

Research is already showing that children in private schools do considerably better than those in government schools, a divergence that is also visible in Young Lives test score data from both older and younger children. While this could represent the fact that children in private schools are from wealthier households, it is possible that part of the effect is institutional.

Young Lives research is also showing a growing gender divide, with more boys being sent to private school while more girls stay in the government system. This is true in Shanmuka Priya’s family. Among the older children, 50 per cent of boys and 37 per cent of girls have been moved to private school.

“No one helps me [with my homework]. No one in my house knows how to write.”

The rise in private education and its potential effect on gender equality *continued*

There is also a huge difference between urban and rural areas, with 80 per cent of older children from urban areas attending private schools but only 31 per cent of those from rural areas. And those from tribal groups or lower castes are also more likely to stay in government schools, despite the fact that 25 per cent of places in private schools are reserved for local children from poor and marginalised backgrounds, and subsidised by the Government.

This raises important questions for policy and research. Most challenging for policymakers is the risk that a growing and unregulated private sector may encourage greater inequalities between households able to afford private education and those not able to, or the fact that households may need to make choices between siblings, especially between boys and girls. These differentials are central areas of research for Young Lives.

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; Pratham (2010) *Annual Status of Education Report 2010*; 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 Education and Development*.

“Why should our children suffer like us? We want them to have a better life. ... I hope our dreams come true.”

Shanmuka Priya's father



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; 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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Young Lives 
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