With a clean face and uniform, seven-year-old Anjana Bano races ahead of her two older brothers as they head for school. On her way, she waves to her disabled mother, watching with pride from the hut her family calls home. This was not always the case. Unlike boys, girls such as Anjana from the Madari community in Rajasthan are not typically educated. “Before I would spend my mornings foraging through garbage looking for anything that could be sold in town, then return home to help my mother, who suffers from polio, take care of my little brother...” Anjana says.

In India, many children fail to receive a quality education. Although some children simply do not have access to a school, others are hindered for socioeconomic reasons. Those fortunate enough to enrol often drop out owing to poor school infrastructure and curriculum. Some do not attend because of the low value their parents place on education. In 2009, a national survey recorded over 8 million out of school children (OOSC) between the ages of 6 and 13 across the country.

To begin to tackle this problem, the Bharti Foundation, in partnership with Educate A Child, initiated the Satya Bharti schools project, one element of which was the creation of learning centres throughout India. Remedial learning programmes were established within government schools for OOSC, and the foundation trained volunteers to conduct community surveys to identify and tutor OOSC and counsel parents on the importance of education.

Today, Anjana has been mainstreamed into a government school and attends regularly; her mother does not want her foraging through garbage. She urges Anjana to study after school. She says, “We never sent Anjana to school, as it is not our community’s practice to allow girls to study, but the volunteer from Bharti convinced me that studying would help Anjana fulfil her dreams and pull her out of poverty. Poverty and ignorance made me lose my limbs to polio; I will not let my children suffer like me.”

Today, the learning centres have enrolled more than 22,000 OOSC like Anjana and are successfully mainstreaming many more OOSC into official government schools. Another element of the EAC/Bharti project has enrolled almost 24,000 additional OOSC directly into existing Satya Bharti schools.

The promise of education opens a world of possibilities for a child. Anjana asserts, “Today I’m going to school; one day I will become a teacher and show other children, both boys and girls, from my community that education can change our lives for the better!”

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