



Model Farm
The Green
Upper Poppleton
York
YO26 6DP
www.projectmala.org.uk
01904 341004

Mala News

Patrons

Felicity Kendal CBE
Maharaja of Benares
Sir Mark Tully OBE
Lady Young
Madeline Weinrib
Obeetee Pvt Ltd
Surya Inc

An action programme for the elimination of child labour in rural India

Greetings!

How we are helping girls

Although society is changing in India and in the cities girls are getting the same opportunities as boys, here in rural Uttar Pradesh life in the villages continues much as it has for hundreds of years. The birth of a girl is still not celebrated in the way a baby boy is welcomed and girls in many families are not as well nourished as their brothers. If food is scarce, girls go to the back of the queue and women routinely eat only after the men in the family have been served. Added to this, girls begin to help their mothers with housework and child care almost from the moment they can walk. While boys often work hard in the fields or the family business, it is accepted that their study time is important and great emphasis is put on giving them the time, space and, most importantly, the light to do their homework, whereas girls can only study once their chores are done and these can be never ending



Even though daughters work so hard in the house, helping their mothers with the siblings, a girl is still often seen as a burden. Not only will her marriage cost her father a high price for the dowry, but also any income she may earn after her marriage will go to her husband's family. In the past, therefore, it was considered that education was wasted on a girl. These days I am pleased to record that attitudes are changing and villagers are beginning to realise that an educated girl might attract a better husband. Even if she doesn't work after marriage,

people are gradually coming round to the idea that an educated girl makes a better mother. However, still, especially in lower caste families, girls are married very early. Child marriages are no longer common, but it is quite normal to marry a daughter at sixteen and, as people from these communities rarely know their correct birth date, it is possible that the girl may be younger still.

At Project Mala we ask parents not to marry their daughters before they graduate from school and now we have no girls marrying while still in school. However, the majority of families start wedding preparations as soon as the girl graduates and it is only if her husband's family supports her further education, that she will be allowed to continue her studies. If she goes to live in a big city she might be admitted to a good university, but in a village the only option is self study through a poor quality private college and motherhood soon puts a stop to this.

Even if a girl has parents enlightened enough to keep her at home until she finishes

university, it is a rare father who will allow his daughter to live away from home in a city to study at a really good institution and so many take courses that will never allow them to fulfil their potential or their dreams of academic success and a good job.



To give you an example, we have a very bright girl in our schools named Sanju. She joined us in 2011 and is a happy girl who loves to dance. Being in our class 12 Sanju is living in Project Mala's hostel studying science with biology with a view to taking a nursing degree. She clearly has a very bright and promising future ahead of her.

However, after the class 10 board exams, Sanju's father arranged her wedding and she returned to us last year wearing the red sindoor powder in her hair parting and the gold earrings of a married woman. Sanju is very happy with the arrangement. Her new husband is the cousin of her sister's husband and she will not go to live with him until she finishes class 12 in March 2021. When she does, she will be joining her sister in the joint family home in Mumbai where she will have an excellent chance of continuing her education in a good college. This is a happy outcome for Sanju, but there are other girls for whom the outcome of an early marriage is very different.



Newsletter written by
Anne Gilmour BA PGCE DipSpLD
Trustee and Education Adviser

If you know anyone who you think might be interested in this newsletter, please forward it on.

Robin Garland MBE
Project Mala
01904 341004
mail@projectmala.org.uk
www.projectmala.org.uk

