

Impact Stories

Case Studies – Actions shared by students

Students shared the following experiences during focused group discussion in their classrooms, through informal talks, and through written responses to a form that was provided to them. Their actions came from their understanding and conceptualizing RIGHTS in their lives. Many of the case studies presented here deserve a mark of respect for the students' enthusiasm and commitment to the values of equality, freedom, and liberty.

PONDI MAKES AN EFFORT

Pondi is a ninth standard boy in an ADW school, Achampatti, near Madurai. At 13 years old and standing five feet tall, he is like any other teenager in his class. The only difference is he learned to value human life at a young age. When boys of his age talk of games, cars, and *Star Wars*, Pondi voices his concern over the discrimination meted out to girl children. Taking his concern a step further, he tried to avert the female feticide of his unborn baby cousin.

When his aunt and uncle learned that they would have a sixth daughter, they immediately decided to go in for an abortion. This young lad summoned up enough courage to speak to the couple about the importance of life and tried to prove to them that it was illegal to kill an unborn baby just because it is a girl. He showed them his *Human Rights Education* textbook and tried his best to dissuade them from perpetrating an inhumane crime.

Though his pleas fell on deaf ears, Pondi had demonstrated that early learning about the importance of human life does have a remarkable impact on youngsters. Pondi was not very satisfied with the result of his efforts and laments, "Although I spoke the truth, they would not listen to me because I am still a young boy." Yet Pondi's teachers were appreciative that one youngster at least had the courage to stand up for the cause of the baby's right to be born.

A BRAVE SON TEACHES A LESSON

Vivek spent all his childhood in a poor family, trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty. Everyday he witnessed his hapless mother being beaten ruthlessly by his alcoholic father. This made Vivek scurry to the dark corners of their little home in fear. This continued until one day when he boldly declared to his father, "I will not go to school if you drink."

This was the beginning of a change in his house. "I was really scared of my drunken father. I hated his behavior but could not say anything. But the human rights education class gave me the courage to speak," says Vivek. Vivek's father was shocked to hear his little boy speak so boldly, and for the first time he realized how shabby and uncivilized his behavior had been. Slowly, he reduced his drinking and began to treat his wife with more care.

GREEN CLUB:

John Marshal and his two friends are studying in 9th Std. at St. Joseph Higher Secondary School, Thiruthuvapuram, Marthandam, K.K. District, Tamilnadu. They were introduced to Human Rights

Education in their 6th Std. and continued up to 8th Std. Human rights education had a great deal of impact on them. They were influenced by various child rights and human rights like the right to education, the right to survival, and the right to protection.

John Marshal shared his experience that everyone has the right to survival, but in his village that right was threatened by environmental degradation. The village pond had been polluted by the villager's using it for bathing, washing cloths, and cleaning cattle. The water had gone bad, and the environment around it was also badly affected. John Marshal and his friends took initiative to preserve the pond. First, they promoted awareness among the villagers for the protection of the pond. Then, they approached the members of the local governing body to get their support to stop villagers' unhygienic practices. They placed a board near the pond that said, "Keep the pond clean and do not use as dust bin." After a period of time the villagers slowly began to change their attitudes and began to use the pond very hygienically. The students prepared a project report called "Preserve our bio-diversity" for school, and it won a state-level prize. They have formed a group called "Green Club" to work for a cleaner environment and to ensure everyone's survival rights by promoting clean air and water. They said that human rights education was a good experience that both provided knowledge and changed their attitudes and behaviors.

Midday meals

Chitra is an 8th Std. student in St. Anne's Girls' Higher Secondary School, Mathavaram, Chennai. She is a human rights student and an active girl. The school provides midday meals for the students usually. One day in 2001, the students found some worms in their school lunches. Miss Chitra took her plate, complete with worms, to show it to the school authorities. She started shouting slogans on protection of children's rights. The other student joined her protest.

Finally, the school administration appointed two teachers to supervise the entire process of preparing the midday meal and the system of distribution. It is notable that the students had been consuming the unhygienic food before they took the human rights classes, but after the human rights classes the students were well-informed about children's rights, rights violations, and discrimination. Unfortunately, Chitra eventually left the school for unrelated reasons.

Concern for the Widow

Sundari is a student in 9th Std. in an Adi-Dravidar Welfare Girls Higher Secondary School. Nalammalpuram Tirunelveli. She is a human right student. Her neighbour is a widow named Patcheammal. The people of her village do not wish to see the widow in the morning hours because they view her personally as a bad omen. Society has given a bad identity to widows. Sundari was worried about the community's blind belief and the suffering it caused her neighbour. She decided to educate the community about their blind belief and the rights of women. She educated her family first and then her neighbours. As a result, the villagers began showing respect and concern for the widowed Patcheammal. Now Patcheammal is a little happier and speaks with the villagers. Sundari's boldness and courage allowed her to do this wonderful thing. Her boldness was from the knowledge she had about human rights and the attitude she gained from her human rights education.

Midday meals

I am Suja, studying in the Adi-Dravidar Welfare Girls Higher Secondary School, Nalammalpuram, Tirunelveli, in 9th Std. When I was in 6th Std. in Thenkalampudur, I used to have my lunch in our school. An old woman, a cook who prepares the midday meal, gives good rice and two eggs to her granddaughter, who is one of the students.

She used to give special attention to her granddaughter and she would not give good rice and curry to any of the other children. I noticed it for long time and decided, with five other children, to report the matter to the headmaster. The headmaster immediately called the woman and enquired about the matter. From that day onwards she started to take care of all the children. Her granddaughter joined with us, and she also stressed to her grandma to take care of all the children equally.

From Despair to Hope

I am Sabitha, studying in 9th Std. at ADW [Adi-Dravidar Welfare] School, Arokanam. I can remember well my father's beating and ill-treating my mother during my childhood days. He used to torture her everyday by beating and burning her with cigarette butts and scolding her in filthy language. This ill-treatment was because he suspected the birth of my elder brother. This torture continued without any break. My elder brother has grown up, but my father keeps on raising the problem and beating him, too. Finally one day my elder brother ran away from the house to escape the torture and cruel living conditions. I also attempted to commit suicide several times with the help of pesticide and erukkampal [the poisonous latex of *Calotropis gigantea*] because of the violence and the abusive language at home day in and day out. While this was going on, human rights education was introduced to our class, and it was an eye-opener for my life.

Human rights education has given me self-confidence and courage to face reality. I realize my survival rights. Everyone has his or her right to live. So why should I commit suicide? This kind of thought made me stronger, and I decided to show society that I can live without fear. Human rights education gave me essential information and empowered me to stand up for my right to live, my right to education, and my right to choose my life's desires.

Rescued from trafficking:

Sabita, who is studying at ADW [Adi-Dravidar Welfare] School at Arokanam, has a school friend named Kavitha who is very interested in education and who also lives close to Sabita's house. Her father, though, is not good man, and he is a drunkard. He beats Kavitha and gives her problems every day. He does not allow her to attend school regularly and forces her to do agricultural work. As Kavitha did not have any other alternatives, she left the school and became an agricultural labourer. Kavitha shared her sorrows and feelings with Sabita and cried. Sabita made her understand the situation and tried to console her, offering to let Kavitha stay in with her at her home. Sabita's grandmother and maternal uncle also agreed to it, but the situation took another course.

Kavitha's father sold her to another person to alleviate his financial difficulties and to get some money for his day-to-day expenses. Kavitha was very frustrated and decided to commit suicide. She took a bottle of pesticide and lay down in her house writhing and shouting. Sabita and her uncle rushed to

Kavitha's house and took her to the hospital. Her life was saved. They lodged a complaint against Kavitha's father, and he was arrested and sentenced to 7 years of imprisonment. After a long and difficult effort Kavitha has been enrolled in the St. Andrew School, Arakonam in 9th Std.

Human rights education has given Sabita boldness and courage to help her friend and face the human rights and children's rights violations that nearly killed her.

Death to Life:

Bibi Jan, studying in 9th Std. at ADW school for girls, Arokanam. Her father is Ismail, a native of Calcutta, and her mother is Sharbunisha, a native of Trichrapalli. Bibi Jan was the first of four girls born to her parents. There is a custom in her father's village: if the first-born is a girl, they kill her immediately (infanticide). Hence, her father took steps to kill her. Bibi Jan was saved, though, by the intervention of her maternal grandmother, who requested that Bibi Jan's father give up the idea and hand the child over to her custody for bringing up. Bibi Jan's grandmother secured custody to ensure the baby's survival and growth. After 7 years of married life Bibi Jan's parents separated.

Bibi Jan lives with her grandmother as per Muslim culture and customs. She is not allowed to go outside without her grandmother's permission. She is never felt alone in the community.

Human right education has turned her into a very bold and courageous child. She has learned a lot of information about human and children's rights. The information has given her a feeling of empowerment. She slowly started sharing the information about human rights and the violations against children and women with her grandmother, and her grandmother understood the subject of their discussion by sharing on rights issues in her own way. Thanks to her own story of survival, Bibi Jan wishes to help other girl children and protect them from the practice of female feticide.

Education my priority.

I. P. Packiaraj, studying in 9th Std. in Vellimallai-Villupuram District. His mother died and his father remarried, but his stepmother is not kind to him. During school holidays he is forced to collect firewood more than three times a day, but he is not provided good food and clothing. She treats him inhumanely and he feels that his rights are being violated. Though he realizes the inhumane situation in his home, he continues to stay there because he wants to complete his studies. Then he feels he will be able to stand up for his human and child's rights easily, as an employed person.

Untouchability continues

I. D. Varatharajulu has a friend who is of a schedule caste and lives on the other side of their village. Once, Varatharajulu's friend invited him over to his house, but his friend's parents requested that he not repeat the visit. They feared that they would get into trouble and have to answer to the village upper-caste people. They would have to explain why their son had invited Varatharajulu to their house. This incident has troubled Varatharajulu greatly and has raised many questions for him. On one hand, he is learning human rights and children's rights, but, on the other, the customs and practices in his village are entirely opposed to these rights.

Counselling

Marithai is a 14 year old girl, studying in 9th standard at ADW School, Elamanur, Madurai. When she was studying in 7th standard, she began puberty, and her orthodox parents instructed her not to talk with any boys at school or in the community. She followed her parents' wishes.

One day a tiffin box was lying in the class room unattended during lunchtime. She came to know that it belonged to one of her classmates who happened to be a boy. With the best intentions, she took it and handed over it to him. Her action was reported to her parents by one of her friends, and she was scolded for it. This incident disturbed her a lot.

The next day she was sitting very sadly in class and her teacher enquired about her sadness. The human right education teacher, who came to know about the incident and knew very well Marithai's good character, called her parents and explained what had really happened. The teacher calmed her parents down and made them understand exactly what their child had done. Because of her kindness, Marithai had proven her leadership qualities and become a leader for the class.

Entry to the temple:

Deepa is a 9th standard girl in ADW School, Elamanur, Madurai. She belongs to a lower-caste community. As per her village custom, lower-caste people cannot come to the local temple and are not to worship God there. After learning about her human rights, one day Deepa entered the temple and tried to worship God.

However, an old man who belongs to the upper-caste scolded her for daring to enter the temple. Deepa explained boldly that faith is enough to worship God. The man who did not expect such bold a response from the little girl went away without saying anything. From that day onward, Deepa has been free to go to the temple with her friends.

Knowledge brings a new life to the earth.

Velmani lives in Samathuyapuram, Sokimangalam, Madurai and studies in 9th standard in ADW School, Elamanur, Madurai. He had human rights education from 6th Std. to 8th Std. and came to understand the various rights of children.

When he was in 7th standard, his neighbour's family was getting ready to have their 3rd child. There was discussion in the family to commit foeticide because the foetus was identified as female. The mother of the child was pressured by her family members to kill the foetus, and the mother agreed to the plan. Velmani came to know this from a group of elders who talking about it in his home.

Knowing about the rights of children, Velmani met the mother and explained the rights of the yet-to-be-born child. He presented her with the *Child Rights* module book from his human rights class. Because of his continuous effort, she changed her mind. At present the baby girl is 3 years old.

Family problem settled

I am Deivameenachi, studying in 9th standard in ADW School, Elamanur, Madurai. When I was studying in 8th standard, my family situation disturbed me greatly. My father use to drink alcohol

and fight with my mother unnecessarily. This happened so frequently in my house that I could not concentrate on my studies. One day I explained my family's condition to my human rights education teacher. She came to my house and met my parents. She explained how their fighting habits affected the children. My parents understood the concern of the teacher. My father promised to give up alcohol and stop fighting with my mother, and both of them agreed not to fight in front of their children.

Because of my teacher's frequent efforts, my parents stopped their fighting. My father also stopped drinking alcohol. Now I am happy, and I can concentrate fully on my studies. I will be a witness for human rights education for the rest of my life.

A child is the father of the civilisation

I am Kanga, studying in 9th standard in ADW School, Elamanur, Madurai. I have studied human rights education from 6th to 8th standard.

One day, while I was studying in 8th standard, I was walking with my grandfather through my village. I noticed that lot of lower-caste people who were around us removed their towels from their shoulders and folded it round their hips as a sign of deference toward us. Even the older men did it. I asked one of the old men about the reason behind it.

He explained that he belongs to a lower-caste community and that he has to do this whenever he sees a higher-caste man like my grandfather. He also mentioned that this is the social custom of our village. Then I pointed out his rights as a human. "All are equal" is the policy of our country. There is no difference among us by caste. I tried to explain it to him, but he was not ready to accept it. Then I discussed this matter with my grandfather. He said that he never asked them to do that, but they do it voluntarily. I asked my grandfather not to allow them to do it from today onwards. He agreed and promised to respect their dignity. Now he treats others equally, and they move freely around him. I can positively say that I received this level of mental maturity and courage only because of human rights education.

Children's Club

We are ninth standard students of ADW School, Elamanur, Madurai. We have studied human rights from our sixth standard onward. When we were in 7th standard, we planned to implement what we learned from our human rights education. We started a children's club. There are ten members in the club. We meet every month and discuss the social responsibilities of children. We are also engaged in some social service activities. We are developing the club under the leadership of Selvan Chinnathambi, another student in 9th standard. The human right education teachers of our school provide us with guidance and encouragement in all of our activities. We are proud of our human rights education teachers, who inspire us to be future leaders.

Social Responsibilities

Rajeshwari, a 9th std. student in ADW school, Punthamalli, Chennai. She has one elder brother who is continuing his education in the college. Her father is an alcoholic, and everyday he mistreats his wife and children, beating them mercilessly. Her father's atrocities disturbed Rajeshwari very much and she became hopeless and was afraid of him. After studying human rights she became bold and courageous enough to put a stop to his inhumane activities. She started to speak to her father about his inhumane attitudes very openly. Her father is a good person and he loves his children, especially Rajeshwari. After the advice from his daughter, he slowly reduced his alcohol consumption and the unwanted activities.

He was also illicitly brewing arrack in the village and selling it. He reduced his intake of alcohol, but his selling of arrack was giving him a lot of money. It had become his primary source of income. Rajeshwari, knowing about her father's activity, felt that her understanding of human rights forced her intervene and put a stop to his arrack business. Still, her father refused to stop his selling arrack.

Rajeshwari, was very much upset and decided to complain to the police. She called up the nearest police station and spoke to them through the telephone without giving her name. A police officer came as she expected, but the officer only collected a bribe of Rs.250/- from her father and went away. Still, she did not give up. She called the police station again after couple of weeks. The same thing happened again; they collected their bribes and left without enforcing the law.

Deciding to end the drama once and for all, Rajeshwari went in search of an honest police officer, who would take action. She found a police officer and informed him personally. The officer, Mr. Sundar, came to her village and arrested her father. He filed cases against her father and took him before a court, which gave him a one-year sentence. She cried a lot due to her affection for her father, but she never felt sorry for her action. After a year, he was released from the jail, and he came back home very happy. Rajeshwari also was very happy that her father returned as a good man, and she assured herself that her father would commit the same crime again. Her belief and hopes disappeared after couple of weeks when he once again started to brew the illicit arrack. But Rajeshwari did not get frustrated.

Rajeshwari decided that she will take the path of love and affection as a weapon to correct her father. She slowly stopped her conversing with her father and eventually refused to see him. She expressed her protest against his activities by refusing to wear the clothes and ornaments purchased by her father with money from his arrack sales. She declared, "I will not wear any new clothes or rings and earrings because these are all earned through the arrack money. I will not touch at all." It was a shock to her father. She wore the old clothes that were available to her and clothes purchased by her relatives, which were purchased with legally earned money. This stand of Rajeshwari has forced her father to give up his arrack business. Rajeshwari is not all that happy, knowing her father, who may restart the same business after some time, but she has decided she will press the issue from within the family.

Child cuts across barriers.

Sobitha is 14 years old and is studying 9th standard at Government Tribal Residential School, Kunjapanai, Nilgiris District. Her family consists of elder sister and her parents. Her village consists of people from various castes and Sobitha and her family belong to backward castes.

As the years passed, her sister completed 12th standard, educated and open to new ideas. She fell in love with one of the village boys who belonged to a scheduled caste. Neither her family nor the community at large knew about the relationship. One fine day, the girl ran away and got married to the man she loved, and the family members of the boy accepted her with some reservations.

All hell broke loose. Sobitha's family could not accept her sister's elopement—especially with a scheduled caste boy. Her parents went to the police station and filed false charges, including kidnapping a minor girl, against the boy.

Human rights education made the difference in this case. Sobitha was a student of human rights education. The teaching of rights, human values and relationships, and the character formation that turns students in the program into leaders of their communities showed vividly in Sobitha. She stood by her understanding of her sister's rights as a human and her rights as a woman.

Sobitha went to the police station along with her parents and some other community members. During the process of complaint and discussion, Sobitha asked the police officer to listen to her version and she said that her sister is of legal age and has completed 12th standard in school. Sobitha said that her sister had eloped of her own volition, and therefore the cases brought by her parents are only to impugn falsely the man she married. The police officer listened carefully to Sobitha's story and dismissed the case. Her parents were angry with her for interfering, but had no alternative because the police officer had listened to her statement. Her courage to speak the truth was rooted in her understanding of human rights and its core values. However, things did not end there.

After a couple of months the in-laws showed their discontent over the marriage, this time refusing to offer a dowry. The new husband also became indifferent to his wife, and, at the urging of his family, asked her to leave the house. This young woman, supported neither by her parents nor by her husband, was left in the lurch. Sobitha once again took hold of the situation and confronted her brother-in-law, telling him that her sister had left her parents' home for his sake and all because of love. How could he leave her now just because his family members did not like her? She pointed to him that she herself had saved him from jail with her bold statement in the police station. The young man realized his mistakes, and he found another home, where he now lives with his beloved.

Sobitha was not satisfied with the marriage of her sister. She wanted her sister and her new brother-in-law to come visit her and to have a cordial relationship with her family. But how to do it? She hit upon a plan. Everyday she read incidents from the *Human Rights* and *Child Rights* books to her mother, and at the same time talking about good times they enjoyed when her sister was there. She also shared the loneliness she felt because she and her sister were kept apart. Her efforts eventually got through to her mother, and her sister was allowed back into their home with love and affection.

Sobitha displayed extraordinary courage by speaking boldly before the community members and law enforcement authorities, and she attributes that courage to her understanding of human rights.

Impact Stories – Actions shared by the teachers

It is commonplace among lay people to say that teachers do not perform their jobs well and that they are not providing quality education to the students. But human rights education has belied these accusations. The capacity building of teachers in the area of rights education has changed paradigms in teaching, has contributed to social change in families, and also has acted as a catalyst in the communities they lead. Individual, inborn traits such as freedom and equality have added to the enlightenment of teachers and have become agents of change in the lives of both teachers and students.

ENLIGHTENED TEACHER

Ms. Gunapoozanam, a middle school teacher in ADW Middle school, Karai, Ranipet was greatly inspired by her human rights education classes. She never imagined, though, that she would ever have the opportunity to use the knowledge she had gained.

The maid working in her house shared her problems with her one day. The maid had paid dowry at the time of her daughter's wedding, but her daughter was being harassed for more dowry money even after the wedding. The desolate maid sought Gunapoozanam's help. She advised her to file a complaint, but the police only told her to "compromise and adjust!" The mistreatment inflicted upon the girl continued.

In the meantime, Gunapoozanam had the opportunity to attend a human rights orientation workshop in Chennai. On her return she found that the maid's daughter was still being abused. This time, equipped with the knowledge needed to help, the teacher guided the maid to seek out a human rights organization. With their support, the maid approached the police station and filed a complaint. Hearing of the complaint the son-in-law mended his ways, offered an apology to the maid, and agreed to treat his wife with love and respect.

The maid had finally found a solution to the inhumane problem that her daughter faced. The knowledge, the attitude, and the skill of the teacher were quite evident in this case. Gunapoozanam says, "Thanks to the human rights education, I have found a new meaning in my life. I have vowed to fight for the cause of human rights in everyday life."

A PROUD FATHER

Mr. Mohandas, a teacher in ADW school was on top of the world when he heard that he was soon going to be a father, but his joy was short-lived. His parents told his wife that she could return home only if she gave birth to a male child. Mohandas had learned through human rights education about the rights of a girl child and the right to be born. He immediately argued with his parents that their orders were unfair and that he, in fact, preferred having a girl child. His parents, though, stood their ground.

Months later, Mohandas's wife gave birth to a girl child. Much against the wishes of his parents, he brought his wife and daughter home. Soon Mohandas's brother's wife gave birth to a male child. This incident brought out the inhumane behaviour of his parents. They began ill-treating Mohandas's wife while they showered utmost care and love on the daughter-in-law who had given birth to a boy.

Mohandas could not continue to witness this injustice, he decided to move to a separate house. "I'm happy I am away from inhuman people. I'm sure they will realize their fault soon. I want my wife and daughter to be happy. **If not for the human rights classes I too would have been inhuman like my parents**". He then counseled his wife and told her that it was not a fault to give birth to girl children and that it was the wrong notion of his parents that was actually inhumane.

GAMBLING GROUNDS

When Raghupathi, a teacher in ADW school, Mallipatti, Vellore District, joined duty in school, he was shocked to see the inappropriate activities around the school premises. Local rowdies sold illicit liquor and some others gambled during the day. He realized the impact this would have on the school children, but he did not know what to do about it.

At first he tried speaking to them and convincing them to stop such activities near the school, as it would affect the schoolchildren. The arrogant people did not yield to his requests but only laughed at him. After attending human rights education classes, Raghupathi learned how to face such situations and, as a responsible citizen, informed the police about the inappropriate activities around the school. The wrongdoers were immediately arrested. Soon afterwards the school premises became a safe place for children. **"The human rights class taught me how to be a responsible citizen, and I feel satisfied for having done my duty,"** says a smiling Raghupathi.

RESCUING VENDORS

Roadside fruit vendors are a common sight near bus stands in most towns in India. Mr. Prabhu, a teacher in ADW school at Masigam, Peranampet, Vellore District, had known this all his life. One evening, when he was with a group of friends near a bus stand, he noticed something strange happening. A group of policemen, headed by their sub-inspector, simply arrested fruit vendors with no reason. "What shocked me most was when people around casually said that this was a regular practice by the police by the end of the month in order to manipulate records," says a concerned Prabhu.

Recalling his human rights lessons, Prabhu was determined to raise his voice against such injustice. Immediately he rushed to the police station with his friends and confronted the sub-inspector. The police official tried to defend himself by saying that he would not take serious action against the vendors, that he would just "book a petty case." Prabhu persisted and quoted laws from the *Human Rights Handbook*. The sub-inspector realized that he was arguing with a well informed and determined person and refrained from booking a case. He released the vendors.

"I attribute this success to my knowledge of human rights, which I learned through human rights education classes in school. I realize that having knowledge of human rights violations will help us to act in such situations," shares Mr. Prabhu.

A MURKY PLOT

Devi, a teacher in ADW high school in Senganatham-Alamelumangapuram, a hill station in Vellore District, was concerned when one of her students, Yuvarani, stopped attending school regularly. She decided to visit Yuvarani's home and find out the reason. When Devi heard her reason for dropping out, she was appalled at the ignorance of Yuvarani's parents and was angered by their action. Yuvarani's brother-in-law had expressed a deep desire to have sexual relations with her, and when she refused he threatened her parents by saying he would not live with Yuvarani's sister anymore. He ordered them to stop sending Yuvarani to school. With the fear that their elder daughter's life was at stake, the parents agreed to his whims and kept Yuvarani from attending school.

Devi was furious with Yuvarani's brother-in-law and decided to teach him a lesson. She first counseled Yuvarani and her parents and convinced them that this was a case of human rights violation. Then she sent a warning to the brother-in-law that she would complain to the District Collector about his intentions. The case was viewed seriously by the collector, and instructions were passed on to the Yuvarani's brother-in-law through the local police.

Devi paid a number of follow up visits to Yuvarani's house and succeeded in bringing her back to school. "I'm happy that my student has succeeded in writing her 10th standard exams. Otherwise, she would have been a drop out and also emotionally battered," says Devi. She has also resolved to guide Yuvarani in her future.

RUNAWAY COUPLE

Karunanidhi, a teacher residing in Arakkonam, relates the story of a young girl who was almost deceived by a wily young military officer. Amala, a 21 year old girl in Parithiputhur, a village not far from Arakkonam, loved a young military officer who belonged to her village. Unfortunately, their love resulted in her pregnancy out of wedlock. At that time, the young man had to go North India to report to his commanders, and he asked her to abort the baby. He promised to marry her the following year during his annual vacation.

The following year, the young man returned to his village for his annual vacation, and once again Amala became pregnant. She demanded that he marry her this time, but the clever man told her they could get married only in Thiruvannamalai, a town 100 kilometers away. Amala agreed, not suspecting that this was a plan the man had hatched to avoid being caught by the people of their home village. In reality, he had planned to abandon her again and go back to North India for another year.

Karunanidhi says, "I got wind of the cunning plans of the boy and immediately sprung into action to avoid the violation of human rights, especially of the girl." He reported young man's misdeeds to the local police. The police intervened and stopped the wedding at Thiruvannamalai. Karunanidhi obtained a written statement from the boy's parents that they would ensure the couple's marriage. In the meantime, the man's vacation ended, and he had to leave once again. That year, Karunanidhi did not give up. With great perseverance and with the support of a human rights organization, he made sure the two got married.

“If not for the human rights education I would not have bothered to help the girl at all. The classes have instilled humanity in me, and I want to spread the word,” says Karunanidhi confidently.

Paving a path for her future

I am A. Jancy Rani, teacher at St. Joseph High School, Mullavillai, Kanyakumari. I am part of the human rights education program here. My training and my work in the classroom gave me strength to address a couple of children’s rights violations in my neighbourhood.

One family near my house has two children, one boy and one girl. Both of them have completed their 10th Std. The boy was enrolled to continue his education in the town school, but their parents, due to their family’s economic concerns, withdrew girl from further enrollment.

I felt that the girl’s rights were being violated, and I decided to intervene with some positive action. I knew that the girl was a good and brilliant student and that she was eager to continue her education. I met her parents and talked to them about gender discrimination, the equal rights of boys and girls to education, and the need to put a stop to human rights violation. I asked them to send their daughter back to school. After a long conversation, they agreed to send her back to school, but they still worried that their family condition would be too poor to support her education’s needs. After understanding their family situation, I began to collect funds from my friends to try to meet the expenses of this girl’s education.

Finally, I enrolled her in the 11th Std. at the town school. Now, she is very happy and is excelling in school.

Women Rights Upheld

J. Ranikkam is a human rights teacher at St. Francis Higher Secondary School, Vavarai, Kanyakumari. She was witness to a human rights violation against a woman named Latha. Ms. Ranikkam resolved this problem with help from her human rights knowledge and training.

Mr. Mani was having a secret relationship with Ms. Mary. Mani’s parents decided it was time to find him a wife and arranged a marriage to Ms. Latha for a considerable amount of money. However, Mani maintained his illicit relationship with Mary, even cohabitating with her while he was married to Latha. He is, of course, not affectionate towards Latha, but he pretends to be in love with her.

After the couple had been married for four years, Mani’s parents came to know of their son’s extramarital affair. They were quite shocked. They did not know how to solve this problem. Mani ignored his wife, Latha, and showed no interest in their married life. Latha suspected his infidelity and finally discovered his relationship with the other woman. She was dumbfounded when she heard the real story from her in-laws. She suddenly felt insecure and frustrated. She informed her parents of the situation. The village elders ordered that Latha and Mani should live together, but even this has failed.

The human rights teacher intervened in this situation to attempt to find justice for Latha. She took Latha and her parents to a Women’s Police Station and lodged a complaint against Mani. The police took a long time to pursue the case, but the human rights teacher followed their progress closely the

whole time. In the end, Latha was allowed to separate from Mani, taking her jewels and a sum of Rs.50,000 with her. Mani was also required to pay her an additional compensation of Rs.50,000. Later the Teacher, turned her efforts toward helping Latha to find a more suitable marriage arrangement. Today, Latha is married and leads a peaceful life.

Community intervention

I am Ms. C. Maria Rajan, Teacher at St. Joseph High School, Siluvaipuram, Kollemcode, Kanyakumari. I attend church regularly every Sunday. On my way to church, I noticed several times that there were a few young boys who sat at a particular street corner. These boys would harass young girls who were on their way to and from my church. It was a very uncomfortable situation for the girls, but they never protested. I decided confront this activity with support from the local community.

One Sunday, I saw the boys on the corner harassing young girls again, and I immediately approached the village leaders to discuss the issue. The village leaders listened to me and approached the young boys, enquiring why they had decided to occupy their street corner. The boys were suddenly frightened and could not respond to the elders' questions. The village elders warned the young boys against harassing girls from street corners, and now the girls at my church are very happy to be free from the boys' constant advances.

Brother supports his sister's education.

I am Ms. C. Maria Rajan, teacher at St. Joseph High School, Siluvaipuram, Kollemcode, Kanyakumari. The prevailing attitude in most rural areas is that education is intended for boys, so only they are given the opportunity to further their educations. In one case, a brother and sister had completed their schooling and were ready to begin college studies. However, only the boy was admitted for higher education. The girl dropped out not because she lacked aptitude but because of orders from her parents.

I came to know about this situation and got involved in it for the sake of girl's education. I discussed her education with her parents, but they were adamant that their daughter could go no further in her studies. Instead of listening to my words, they simply described the traditional role of a girl her age. They said that girls continue their lives by marrying into new families and that they would need to save the money that could be used for her college career in order to pay for her wedding. I attempted to explain the equality of gender rights in education, but they remained intractable.

Seeing that I could make no progress with them, I tried a new avenue. I approached her brother and explained the issue in terms of human rights. This convinced him that his sister's education is as important as his own and that he ought to pressure his parents to send her to school with him. In protest, the young man declared that he would not attend college unless his sister could do the same. Eventually, their parents allowed their daughter to continue her education.

Back to school

Ms. S. Sagaya Jayarani, teacher at St. Patrick Middle School, Kuyavarpalayam, near Madurai, has come across a human rights violation in her class. A student named Suganya was studying in 8th

standard. One day the girl did not attend school, and on inquiry it was found that her father had sent her to be employed at a dying unit.

The teacher met with Suganya's father and asked him why he did not send his daughter to school. He replied very harshly, stating that he had become old and could not work to support his family. "You can take any action and put me in the jail. I never mind," he said. The teacher approached Suganya's mother and asked her to send their daughter back to school, but Suganya's mother was also unwilling to comply. The teacher continuously met with her and counseled her on Suganya's need to be in school. Eventually, Suganya's mother gave her consent. The teacher arranged to monitor Suganya's enrollment until she was certain the child would not be withdrawn again. Now Suganya is studying, and she helps her family by earning money after school.

Child marriage stopped

I am D. Sermain Anthony Mary, working at St. Patrick's Middle School, Madurai. Priya is a student in my class. She is very dedicated to her education, and she wanted to become an eminent figure when she grows up. However, her parents decided to arrange for her marriage to her maternal uncle. She refused the arrangement and came to me with tears in her eyes to complain about her parents' plans. I met with her parents and explained her unwillingness to marry and her interest in getting an education. I tried to convince her parents by outlining the rights of young girls and by pointing out that arranged marriages are particularly inappropriate for girls who are underage.

I asked them to postpone her marriage and to encourage her to continue her education. I said that if she is educated properly she will be able to take care of her parents and will be able to lead a life that is much better than what they could currently provide. Her parents were convinced. The marriage was postponed, and they provided her with the necessary support for her education. Ms. Priya studied all the way through college and got a job on her own. She eventually married her uncle and lives comfortably. If I did not stop the early marriage of this child, Priya would have discontinued her studies, becoming just another dropout. She would have ended up as yet another woman confined to a life within the four walls of her house. **Human rights education is a life-oriented education and is necessary for every human being.**

Mortgage of a child

Ms. S. V. Govindammal is a human rights teacher in a Government Adi-Dravidar Welfare School in Peranampattu, Vellore District. Human rights education motivated her to be involved in child protection. Rajasekaran is a 6th standard student in her school. His parents mortgaged him to a beedi [a kind of small but potent cigarette] merchant for a sum of Rs.5,000 to help the family through some financial difficulty. Despite the legal proscription against bonded labour, this practice is still prevalent in every state in India. Mortgaging a person for labor is one of many methods used to continue the practice without alerting officials. The teacher came to know about this human rights violation after 4 months and, she quickly collected essential information regarding this issue.

She contacted the Child Labour Abolition Officer from the Labour Department in Tamil Nadu and filed a case against the beedi company. The officer took immediate and appropriate action against the beedi company, releasing Rajasekaran from the clutch of the owners. The teacher made sure

Rajasekaran was reenrolled after his release. She and the labour officer warned Rajasekaran's parents that, if the child does not attend school regularly, action will be taken against them.

A teacher becomes an activist

Ms. Vanaja is a teacher in a Government Adi-Dravidar Welfare School in Pallavakkam, Chennai. Some of the scheduled-caste children in the school do not attend regularly. Ms. Vanaja decided to investigate, and, to her utter shock, she found that many of the children were employed as domestic servants in their own teachers' homes.

Vanaja was very angry when she came to know of this. As a human rights education teacher, she wanted to do something to stop this appalling behavior. She sent a number of petitions to the appropriate officials and met the school's headmaster to resolve this problem. The headmaster also felt guilty when he realized the violation of human rights in his school and warned the teachers to stop. He announced that he would take severe action against any teachers who did not immediately desist. After this, the children's attendance quickly normalized. The other teachers are still angry with Vanaja, but that does not disturb her one bit.

Hygienic food

Mr. T. Srinivasan, teacher in Government Adi-Dravidar Welfare School, Maneputhirpatti, Thanjavur. Our school provides midday meal for its students. The meal, though, has historically been prepared in unhygienic ways. One day I invited the midday meal supervisor to our human rights class. The students raised a number of questions related to midday meal preparation and kitchen hygiene. She soon realized her mistake and promised the students that she would prepare the food properly in the future. To this day, the students' meals are hygienically prepared.

Though this incident seems quite commonplace, the teacher's initiative needs to be appreciated. Before his human rights education training, he was a mute spectator. His human rights education training has given him a new way of thinking and the energy to face inappropriate behavior. Additionally, we must also appreciate the students' boldness as they demanded that their food be properly prepared.

Seeking legal supports

I am Kumaresan, teacher in Government Adi-Dravidar Welfare Middle School, Erampakkam, Villupuram. Arumugam, one of my students, belongs to a scheduled caste. Naughtiness is part of any child's normal behavior, and Arumugam is no exception. One day he plucked some mangoes from a garden that belonged to people in an upper-caste. The upper-caste people caught him and tied him to a tree. He was beaten brutally. His parents came to the garden and begged the upper-caste people to release him. They refused to release the boy and spoke very abusively to his parents. The upper-caste people had taken the law into their own hands; they violated Arumugam's rights as a child and his rights as a human, all because he was born into a scheduled caste.

It was then that my human rights education training came in to support me. I took this issue to the police station and filed legal action against the upper-caste people. Fearing repercussions from the police, the upper-caste people left the boy alone. I felt a tremendous inner joy at having stood up for the human rights of this little boy.

Challenging false complaint

Suresh, a relative of mine, fell in love with an upper-caste girl and married her under the Special Marriage Act with the full knowledge of both of their families. After some time, the girl's parents convinced her to leave her husband and come back to their house. They filed a dowry case [charges against a groom and his family claiming that they violate national laws by demanding a dowry from the bride's family] against Suresh and the police arrested him.

M. Mohan Doss, teacher at Adi-Dravidar Welfare School, Karai, Ranipet, along with other teachers who had undergone human rights education training had been involved in helping the couple to get married. When they heard about the false charges, they went to the police station and complained to a sub-inspector there. The sub-inspector verified the case and, after meeting the girl separately and learning the facts of the case, asked both the groups to compromise. The girl's parents, understanding the situation, withdrew the case, and all issues were settled amicably. Today, Suresh and his wife live together in our colony.

Individual attention.

R. Udayakumar is studying in +2 [equivalent to 12th standard] in our school. His family condition is not favourable for his studies. He comes from broken home. His father is has retired from the military and lives on his own. Udayakumar's mother is mentally ill and is unable to be a mother to her children. Because of her disorder, there is a tremendous amount of noise in their home, and the atmosphere of the home is never peaceful. Udayakumar is unable to concentrate on his studies there.

I am Ms. F. Arul Helen Rose, teacher at Roman Catholic High School, Puliangudi, Thirunelveli, and I understood his situation. I was also sure that his family life would not help him to continue his studies. I took him to our school's headmaster and explained the situation. I requested that the headmaster allow Udayakumar to stay in the school's hostel until he completes his 12th standard exams. As we expected, he passed his +2 with high marks and has now moved on to study at the Government Engineering College.

Circus girl

I am R. P. Rosalin Jesentha, teacher in Roman Catholic Middle School, Rosary Church, West Gate, Madurai. One day, when a friend and I entered the Periyar Bus Stand, I saw a big crowd, and wanted to know why it had gathered. Entering the crowd, I was shocked to see that a 5-year-old girl was entertaining the crowd by bending her body into painful positions and walking on a tight rope. Through further enquiry, I found out the girl's family was from Maharashtra and they made their money by performing in street-side circuses like this one. Such circuses are inhumane and exploitative of young children.

My friend and I shouted at the crowd, "We should not encourage this kind of inhuman activities. The man is exploiting his daughter to do some unusual exercise and violating her rights. She is supposed to go to the Kindergarten!" The crowd slowly started moving away. I met the bus stand manager and reported to him that the Transport Corporation should not allow inhumane performances like this.

Some of them questioned my actions, saying that I had deprived a poor man of his meal. To me, though, it was about the violation of 5-year-old girl's human rights—not her father's next meal.

Changed perceptions

Mr. C. Marimuthu, teacher at Bomminaya-Kanpatti, Theni District. He is a human rights teacher, and his experience is a good example for many students of how to be a human rights activist:

Around 400 students study in our school, and they come from various religious backgrounds and caste affiliations.

In the classroom the students used to sit according to their castes and were not willing to mingle together as one larger group. The students even base their friendships on caste. If we forced the upper-caste students to sit with the scheduled-caste students, the upper-caste students walked out of the classroom. During lunchtime, if I asked the upper-caste children to bring my lunch box from the staff room, they refused to bring it, stating that they should not touch anything belonging to someone from a lower caste. They said this to their teacher!

I wondered what had happened to our society. What kind of education are we giving our children, and why does untouchability continue even after so many decades of awareness and social movements?

Human rights education came as an answer to my questions. Human rights education questions the age-old traditions. It calls young minds to question their traditions, giving them the power to reevaluate the inhumane actions of upper-caste students. Human rights education has built a bridge across caste distinctions in my class.

The visible and positive outcome of human rights education is that there is no more caste division in my classroom. On the school campus, students of all backgrounds sit together and even share food. They join together for games and play as students of one class. This progressive change was successful, but it was also limited to my school's campus. With support and guidance from IHRE, I took some of the students on a field trip to Kerala so that they could learn to be agents of change beyond the classroom. This has helped the students bond to various communities that they would not have normally encountered.

Another important social issue in our village is that a backward caste community, called Raja Kambalakararkal, makes a practice of pulling its female students out of school once they begin puberty. Their argument is that girls will have unwanted relationships with boys, and these relationships would have negative effects on families in the community. They indicate that a large number of girls are married before they reach legal age at 18. Hence, human rights education is useful to all areas of society and should not be limited only to schools.